

THE GREAT WORLD

*BY A GENTLEMAN WITH
A DUSTER*

THE MIRRORS OF DOWNING
STREET

THE CONSERVATIVE MIND

THE GLASS OF FASHION

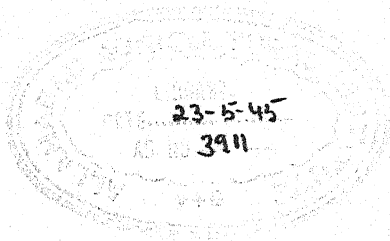
PAINTED WINDOWS

SEVEN AGES

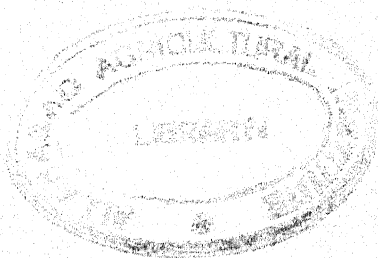
DECLENSION

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BY
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THIRD EDITION



MILLS & BOON, LIMITED
49 RUPERT STREET,
LONDON, W.1

Published - September, 1925

*Made and Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Limited,
Southampton.*

BOOK I

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I

SOON after luncheon, on a summer day as cheerful and composed as herself, Mrs. Townley of Cumberfield retired to her bedroom, which was furnished with good solid Victorian mahogany, and rang the bell for her maid.

This maid, whose name was Roscoe, had begun life in the household of Cumberfield as under-nurse to Mrs. Townley's first baby, and now, as a rather faded piece of old family furniture, was the only person in the world on whom it could ever be said that Mrs. Townley leaned.

"Nanny," she announced, in the firm voice that had addressed a hundred public meetings, "I am driving Miss Isabel over to Durridge."

At this announcement the old nurse rubbed her hands together at the level of her waist, nodded her head in a significant manner, and moved vivaciously towards the wardrobe. "Then you must wear your new velvet mantle," she said, "and the Paris bonnet with the violet strings."

At the door of the wardrobe she turned to her mistress, who was now seated before the dressing-table in a comfortable bay commanding a wide view of the moors, and added this remark: "As if it was only yesterday, dear ma'am, I remember you coming into my nursery one afternoon and seeing Miss Isabel seated at the table drawing pictures, with the little gentleman standing at her side watching what she was drawing, their pretty heads almost touching; yes, and I remember you coming up to me, where I stood by the tall fender, with my knitting in my hands, and saying into my ear, as you nodded towards the two children, 'Ah, Nanny, then I should be satisfied!' Those were your very words. And many's the time I have *prayed*, dear ma'am, that those words of yours might come true."

Mrs. Townley, who was not a sentimental person, but, on the contrary, a person famous throughout a considerable region of the North of England for great practical common sense, nodded to herself in the glass, and replied briskly: "That must be ten years ago, Nanny; I remember it perfectly."

The face which Mrs. Townley regarded in the looking-glass was small and round, with a pleasant, rather weather-beaten complexion, very frank brown eyes, and iron-grey hair worn straight back from the open forehead. It was, above everything else, the face of a direct mind and a decisive will, the face of a sensible and brusque woman who had never gone astray in the subtleties of thought.

"It was the year, dear ma'am," said the pale Roscoe, bringing the Paris bonnet to the dressing-table, "when my sweet Master George married the Honourable Louise, the same year as the Phoenix Park murders, and the year after Lord Beaconsfield died. Miss Isabel was keeping her tenth birthday, and his Grace had brought the little gentleman over from Durrige, and the two children paired off as natural as if they had been made for each other."

"You remind me of my Aunt Emily in your memory for dates," said Mrs. Townley, attending to her grey hair.

"I can remember everything to do with all of my little darlings," replied Roscoe proudly; "everything, little and big."

"It is perfectly true," said Mrs. Townley; "if I could live to see my daughter a duchess I should be satisfied. Well, no; not *a* duchess, Nanny, for I would rather see the child married to a penniless curate than the wife of a dissolute aristocrat, however exalted his rank; that goes without saying; but *the* duchess, that is to say, our Duchess of Rothbury."

"It would be the crown, dear ma'am," said Roscoe very fervently, "of a noble life."

The noble life of Mrs. Townley had begun some sixty years before this history opens in a Yorkshire rectory, where, from the ambling carelessness of her father and the bland incapacity of her mother, she, Georgina Hornby, had imbibed such a passion for order, and such an enthusiasm for vigorous and direct thinking, as had made her one of the greatest ladies in the North of England.

It may truly be said of her that from Bishopthorpe, where she had long been regarded as the Peter Robinson of the Established Church, to Alnwick Castle, where she was now looked upon as the Barnum of the Primrose League, Mrs. Townley of Cumberfield was the one person immediately thought of by any philanthropist in that part of northern

England who desired to get up a bazaar, to organise a political garden-party, to establish a cottage hospital, or to direct the hospitality of a Church Congress.

At the age of five-and-twenty, when she was a tall, pleasant-looking, and very healthy girl, Georgina had attracted the attention of a young ironmaster. This ironmaster, Mr. Christopher Townley by name, finding himself for the first time in his life at a philanthropic function in which he was expected to take a public part, very gratefully welcomed the robust sympathy and capable guidance of Miss Hornby, who seemed to direct everything with an ease and a self-possession which marked her out, not merely as a person of distinction, but as a rock of defence for young gentlemen of a shy and sensitive habit.

Mr. Townley's mother, who entertained exalted ambitions for her son, accepted with a fair grace his engagement to Georgina on learning that, in spite of her obscure and impecunious situation, she had a viscount's younger son for her grandfather, and was on terms apparently cordial with a few of the best county families. Happily for Georgina, the mother lived to see something at least of the splendour which the girl's force of character and energy of mind brought to the name of Townley, and died very happily, thanking God that her grandchildren were now safely delivered from the primeval curse rightly resting on the middle classes.

This marriage was at every point a success. The nervous and diffident ironmaster was grateful to a wife who gladly took the whole burden of social life off his shoulders, and the competent wife was grateful to a singularly upright and generous husband who provided her with a revenue amply sufficient to make that social life a brilliant triumph.

The fact that she was a teetotaler, and never permitted wine to appear upon her table, did in some measure impoverish the success of her dinner-parties, keeping away, not only distinguished members of the aristocracy who drank wine because they liked it, but even certain dignitaries of the Church who drank wine because their doctors had ordered it. But in every other respect Mrs. Townley was a justly popular person, famous for great organising capacity, for magnificent courage in speaking her mind, and for a cheerfulness and vigour of disposition which acted like a tonic on all those who came her way.

When she was three-and-forty she gave birth to her first

daughter, after having presented herself, rather than her husband, with five sons, to whose education and upbringing she devoted the most vigorous of her energies. The birth of Isabel came as something of an interruption to this educational work, which absorbed her; and for a brief period of the child's life, while Mrs. Townley was marrying those sons into the fringes of aristocracy, Isabel was left almost entirely to the admirable care of Roscoe. But when the youngest of her tall sons had become a partner in a shipbuilding company on the Tyne, after a distinguished mathematical career at Cambridge, Mrs. Townley discovered an extraordinary pleasure in her only daughter, and from that moment lavished on Isabel the wise affection and the resistless ambition which had hitherto been equally divided, and with remarkable success, between her five sons.

To this end Miss Curtis, with the highest testimonials from a German Grand Duchess, had been engaged as governess-in-chief, and, when the child grew older, a music-master recommended by Signor Tosti, a drawing-master recommended by Sam Evans of Eton, and a dancing-mistress recommended by the Duchess of Sutherland, had been engaged to complete Isabel's education. Nothing, in short, was spared to make Mrs. Townley's daughter the wonder of the age.

After her presentation at Court, and when Herbert Stretton, the great-grandson and heir of the Duke of Rothbury, was still at Oxford, Isabel was sent with Miss Curtis for a year's tour of the chief cities in France, Germany, and Italy. From that tour, on which she had read Augustus Hare, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater, she had now returned; and, as Herbert Stretton had lately come back to DurrIDGE Castle unengaged after a London season, Mrs. Townley decided that the two young people should at last meet again, and renew, if God so willed it and she could manage it, that affectionate relationship which had so prettily characterised the days of their childhood.

Such were the dispositions of this wise and practical woman on the autumn afternoon in the year 1892, when, to borrow a famous author's phrase, this history chooses to set out. Mrs. Townley had realised ten years ago the dangers of a too close and uninterrupted friendship between children admirably suited for marriage, and to avert this single danger had risked her whole ambition.

Mother and daughter got into a comfortable landau, a

footman respectfully tucked them up, a pair of tall horses danced on their hind feet, and then away bowled the carriage through the park of Cumberfield, with the sun shining on the two ladies, and the pale and faded face of Roscoe watching prayerfully from an upper window.

II

IN a moorland country famous for the romantic nature of its beauty—a country of tall rocks, turbulent rivers, and far-spreading woods—DurrIDGE Castle stands at the head of a rock-strewn and clangorous dene, twelve miles inland from the iron-bound coast of the North Sea. From the terrace on the western side of its formidable architecture this ancient castle, however, commands a prospect as tender and lovable as the eastern view is passionate and disordered.

On this western side of the castle, as if its towers and battlements had for such long ages sheltered the land from the menace of the sea that all fear had gone out of it, the country is as pastoral as Penshurst, in Kent, or Buckhurst, in Sussex. Yet, on every side of it, rising up like purple clouds behind the great trees of the park, dim and ominous against a grey sky, are the mountains and the moors, from whose wind-swept and often snow-covered heights descend those thunderous cataracts which in the green and gentle valley become wide rivers, overhung by the branches of trees clinging to the lower slopes of the hills. There, with cattle standing in their pools, these rivers move through the green land in one slow and shallow flood, swerving away from, and past, the great castle of DurrIDGE, till a sudden plunge over a ledge of rock sends their mingled waters, with a roar which never ceases, into the dene beyond, and so onward and eastward, always descending, to the invisible sea.

It was on this western terrace, bright with sunshine, that Mrs. Townley and Isabel found the old Duke of Rothbury. He was seated in a wheel-chair, for he was a victim of arthritis, with a rug over his knees and a shawl round his shoulders. The twisted hands clutched a small silver bell on a tray fixed to his chair.

He was a little man with a singularly acute face, birdlike in character because of the brightness and briskness of the eyes and the beaklike shape of the nose. The hair, which was snow white, stood up like a tuft above the forehead, and

descended thickly to the ears, where it became a pair of whiskers reaching below the level of the mouth, thus providing the whole lively face, with the exception of the independent, long chin, with a frame of fibrous snow. The cheeks, veritable *pommettes*, were rounded and smooth. The upper lip was brevity itself, and the line of the mouth as capricious and wavering as if a child had drawn it. As for the bright eyes, which were at once peppery and good-humoured, they were set deep in their sockets and unusually wide apart, pale blue in the iris, with a small and restless pin's point for the pupil.

This famous old man, who had outlived all his contemporaries, had been born fifteen years before the battle of Waterloo, and had taken a dignified, if not an eminent, part in the political history of his nation, from the early days of George the Fourth down to the death of Disraeli in 1881. He had been as a boy to the Court of George the Third, who was one of his godfathers; had known Canning; had been one of Wellington's firmest friends, one of Peel's most powerful opponents; had fought Grey in 1832; had helped to establish a friendship with the French under Louis Philippe; and had played an honourable part in Lord Durham's great work for Canada and Lord Lawrence's immortal work for India.

In another direction he had been the friend of many illustrious men of genius, from Sir Walter Scott, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and Michael Faraday down to Thackeray, Carlyle, Millais, and Tyndall. He was famous among such people for his good judgment, his unerring taste, and the playfulness of his humour. He had an unaffected admiration for genius, but would never take any man, even the greatest, too seriously; he had a sharp and mordant contempt for mediocrity, but never allowed the most stupid of men to exaggerate his anger. Often he flung out his bitterest gibe with a smile or a chuckle, and it was seldom, even at the most peppery stage of his career, that he lost control over his feelings.

His hospitalities had always been characterised by restraint, even in an age of splendour, and he had travelled about Europe in his early manhood with a simplicity which many who used ostentation to advertise the consideration due to them condemned as miserliness. He was essentially a countryman, and a countryman from the North of England; but, all the same, he was far better acquainted with the real culture

of mankind than many of those London fashionables who employed the French idiom at every turn, and affected to despise the rusticity of their native civilisation.

Only one romance, long since forgotten, had ever been associated with his name. The story that he had endeavoured to cut out Count D'Orsay in the affections of Lady Blessington was never believed by anybody with real knowledge of the world in which he moved; but it is true that he did in later life fall very foolishly in love with the Comtesse de Castiglione, and was running after her with the ardour of a love-sick boy, to the despair of Lord Derby, when society was in a frenzy and the country in an uproar over Lord Ellenborough's dispatch to the Governor-General of India.

Apart from this violent episode in his middle age, happily as brief as it was violent, the duke's life, which was first and foremost that of a great territorial lord with responsibilities of an almost royal order, had been devoted to politics and culture, and the repeated tragedies which befell him one after another in the death of his devoted wife, the loss of his sons—three of whom perished in the Crimea—and his favourite grandson—who was killed at Tel-el-Kebir—were borne with a dignity which commanded universal respect. Before he was stricken with arthritis, and so had lost the power of movement, there were few men in the country whose public appearances were greeted with a sincerer affection, and this although his utterances had long since been adjudged by the greater part of an urbanised nation as the mere echoes of a Toryism extinct in the days of Peel.

Mrs. Townley's efforts to convert him to the evangelical character of Christianity had been as unavailing as the efforts of pretty Miss Jenkins, long ago, to convert the soul of his old friend the Duke of Wellington; but, although she had long since abandoned those efforts, she did not now approach him in his extreme old age with any trepidation in her heart concerning a matter which was perhaps even nearer to her affections than his spiritual conversion. This indefatigable woman believed that she had weapons enough in her armoury of woman's wit to overcome any objection so old an invalid might raise to the desirable marriage of his great-grandson to her only daughter.

III

WHEN the ladies from Cumberfield had touched the twisted right hand of the duke, and had seated themselves in the chairs brought by footmen from the castle, the old gentleman turned his head towards Isabel, who looked extremely pretty and fresh in a dress of white silk, and began to inquire after her travels.

It was soon plain, however, that he was not greatly interested in her answers, and Mrs. Townley was quick to cut in with the decisive remark that she was quite sure Isabel had seen nothing so beautiful in all her travels as the view of DurrIDGE park from the terrace.

"This view," said the old duke, "is well enough, but I am afraid the beauty is only a fine cloak thrown over a very ugly poverty. The rascals are starving us. We may last twenty or thirty years more, but no longer." He turned to Isabel blinking his eyelids, and asked, "Do you know, my dear, what the Duke of Wellington said of Sir Robert Peel?"

Miss Curtis had failed to inform her pupil of this matter, and Isabel rather nervously replied, "No, duke, I'm afraid I don't," much to her mother's satisfaction, who knew how the old like to inform modest young people of things they do not know. She smiled on Isabel, and then turned a face that truly sparkled with inquiry to the duke.

The old man made a movement in his chair, as if settling down to enjoy himself, and spoke as follows:

"He said, my dear—and he was the greatest Englishman of his day; in some respects one of the wisest men that ever lived—he said of Sir Robert Peel, '*There is a gentleman who never saw the end of a campaign.*' That was the judgment of a great man on a small man, of a far-sighted statesman on a short-sighted politician. Sir Robert Peel never saw the long consequences of his acts. He saw that cheap bread would be a help to the manufacturers, who have been the ruin of England, and so, betraying his party, he repealed the Corn Laws. Huskisson, who was a rascal, put him up to it. They wanted cheap bread to save the manufacturers from paying a decent wage to their factory slaves. That was the extent of their philanthropy. What happened? Sir Robert Peel depopulated the villages of England, pauperised the peasantry of the country, impoverished the landlords, ruined agriculture, and crowded the slums of hideous cities with a rickety population of revolutionary knaves, no more fit to be called

Englishmen than the lascars who are now going to man our British marine."

All the time he was ruminating in this fashion, Mrs. Townley, who leaned eagerly towards him, her round face bright with intelligent appreciation, kept on rapping in an encouraging "Yes," and sometimes a double "Yes, yes," with a nod of her head.

The duke, clutching at his silver bell, and taking no notice of Mrs. Townley, continued his meditations: "Lord Grey was another gentleman who never saw the end of a campaign. The cant of his Reform Act has given birth to the absurdity of democracy, and democracy has produced trades unions, and it will go on till general anarchy is in possession of the field. You have got an Independent Labour Party in this Parliament—four rascals attacking capital. That's only a beginning. There'll be a Government of Socialists in this country before very long."

"Oh, no, duke; impossible!" cried Mrs. Townley.

"But there will be."

"We shall see that it never comes to *that*!"

"What, you'll turn back the tide of democracy? Try it! No, no. The country is dead and done for. It's only waiting for the undertaker. Votes for the ignorant! Votes for the irresponsible! Votes for Tom, Dick, and Harry! A fine idea! The country's mad. As if government were not a science of the highest order. I shouldn't be surprised if women were given the vote. The fate of India, the destiny of Canada, entrusted to the laundry-maid, the scullery-maid, and the ballet-girl! Why not? If my cowman's vote is as good as mine, why shouldn't a barmaid's vote be as good as a crossing-sweeper's? If votes are to decide the destinies of the British Empire, let everybody vote, male and female—the more the merrier!"

He turned to Mrs. Townley, who was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, for she was something of a Tory democrat. "You sent me the other day a pamphlet about education—adult education," he said, with an amused smile. "What is to be the end of that campaign, dear lady? Those who are conducting it don't know the meaning of the word education. They'd call a hedger and ditcher who can't write his name uneducated, and a little snip of a clerk who can read a *Bow Bells* novelette without a dictionary educated. My dear lady, education is the process by which our statesmen unfit people to think and act for themselves. The Act of 1870

has done more to destroy the self-reliance and the native wisdom of the English people than any other crazy enactment of our lick-spittle politicians. And it has displaced, the authority of true culture. It has enthroned mob taste and mob manners. Look at the newspapers. Look at the popular novels. Look at the dress of the people. Shoddy—everything is shoddy. That's the influence of the half educated. Sentiment is in charge of the human race. That infernal Frenchman has corrupted the whole world."

"Who is that?" inquired Mrs. Townley, anxious to divert the duke's censure from her own misdemeanours.

"Why, Rousseau," he replied, munching his teeth together. "The Duke beat Napoleon, but Rousseau conquered England. Read Burke, and you will see what I mean. Do young ladies read Burke?" he inquired with a kinder smile, turning to Isabel.

"I have read his essay on the origin of our ideas concerning the sublime and beautiful," answered Isabel, making her mother's heart leap with joy.

"A miserable, bad thing," said the duke. "The worst thing he ever wrote. Rubbish, rubbish! Read his political writings, my dear. Don't let your mother corrupt you. She calls herself a Conservative, but she's no more a Conservative than Dizzy was, or this rascally fellow Vernon Harcourt is a Whig, or this new fellow—what's his name?—the fellow who has just got into Parliament—a collier or a navvy, something of that sort? Ah, that's it—Keir Hardie; your mother is no more a Tory than Keir Hardie is an Englishman. She's a reformer, like all the rest of the world, and every reformer is an enemy of reason."

"But, dear duke, don't tell the child, I beg you," expostulated Mrs. Townley, leaning forward with a placating smile, "that when we see an evil we are not to attack it."

The duke chuckled. "That's just what I do tell her," he said.

Mrs. Townley was genuinely astonished. She almost threw up her hands.

"What, we are to——"

"Never attack an evil," said the duke. "Never. Certainly not. Let it die out. All the trouble in the world comes from fussy people who will insist on interfering with the processes of nature. From Luther to Cromwell, and from Cromwell to Rousseau, and from Rousseau to Gladstone, the greatest rascal and windbag of the lot, the world has been going from

one feverish attack to another, until now it is in a condition of hysterics, and only fit for a strait waistcoat. Keir Hardie, indeed! And who's the other humbugging fellow calling himself a representative of Labour? Ah, I've got it—John Burns. A pretty couple; and there are two more of them in this new Parliament; a party of four, preaching revolution, stirring up discontent, calling themselves the friends of Labour! Why, the Duke would have had 'em shot in two minutes."

"Wait a moment," said Mrs. Townley very decisively, but with so pleasant a smile that it was certain she intended a compliment; "who was it that, more than anybody else in the country, helped dear Lord Shaftesbury to pass his Factory Acts?"

"Ah," said the duke, with a waggle of his head, "but that was only because I hated the manufacturers. They had ruined agriculture, they had stolen our political power, and I was determined that they should pay a part of the price, the miserable rascals. Shaftesbury was not a bad fellow; I knew him very well; but he became too sentimental as he went along. I always called him Sir Robert's dustman. He spent his life clearing up the mess made by Peel. I wish Peel had lived to see that mess. *Respice finem!* Ah, he never saw the end of a campaign. I wish he were alive, so that I could cram the big drum of the Salvation Army over his head and drag him on a tour of England's slums. I should like to show him what he has brought us to. But people don't believe it even now! They don't take long views in these days; they prefer short cuts, and all their short cuts to the millennium are across other people's property. Perhaps they can't take long views. I notice it's a spectacled generation."

At this point in the duke's remarks Mrs. Townley was conscious of a sudden intensity in Isabel, and, looking carefully up, without attracting the duke's attention, saw Herbert Stretton, preceded by two pointers, approaching through the park, with a gamekeeper by his side, a gun under his arm, a retriever at his heels.

As she caught sight of him the young man paused to look at a Clydesdale mare whose foal was feeding with others at a little distance. "Yes," she said, "it's a short-sighted generation. You are quite right, duke. *That's* what is wrong with the present generation."

"My sight," continued the duke, "at the age of ninety-two, is good enough to see that Herbert is coming towards

us, and that means tea, and an end of my savagery. I daresay you'll be very glad."

"Oh, so Herbert is back from London," said Mrs. Townley, looking up with admirable surprise.

"Yes, back unscathed from the attractions and bedevilements of the most un-English city in the British Isles. One thing I can say of my great-grandson with some confidence—he's an incurable Englishman."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Mrs. Townley, noticing that the keeper had taken Herbert's gun, and with the two pointers was crossing the park to his cottage in the trees.

"Well, the English are a stupid people," laughed the duke, "an uncommonly stupid people; and I'm not sure whether my great-grandson is not the stupidest of the whole lot of them."

"Oh, duke, you mustn't say that," cried Mrs. Townley, joining in his laughter, but singing with joy in her heart. "I am quite sure that Herbert is exactly what he promised to be as a boy."

"A great dunce?"

"Certainly not!"

"But you wouldn't call him an ornament of society?"

"I should call him a thoroughly sound, honourable, and upright country gentleman," said Mrs. Townley, with splendid conviction.

"Well, I think he is that," admitted the duke. "And I'll tell you something else about him; he's a very affectionate fellow."

"I'm sure he is."

"He looks after me like a woman. Very remarkable that, in a young man. I suppose, if he had more brains, he'd vote me a nuisance and be off to Paris, enjoying himself and frightening his banker."

"I'm quite sure he wouldn't," said Mrs. Townley; "and I am also quite sure that he has more brains than you pretend to think he has."

"There, dear lady, you are wrong. He's a good fellow, but a numskull if ever there was one."

By this time Herbert Stretton had approached near enough to the terrace to identify the duke's guests. His face showed relief rather than pleasure.

He was somewhat above the middle height, of so solid and thickset a structure that he looked like a young blacksmith, while his round face, burnt to the colour of a coffee-bean, wore an expression of such unalterable impassivity

that he might have been taken for a field-labourer. All the same, there was a certain indefinable distinction about him, something aloof and almost noble—not aloof and noble in any spiritual or intellectual sense, but rather as we feel a dog who admits us to his friendship to be aloof from our own life, and occupied with a nobility of which we are entirely ignorant.

He came through the garden without haste, and without any sign of awkward self-consciousness. He greeted the ladies with friendliness, but without a smile on his face, and with no amusing words on his lips. As soon as it was possible to do so he turned to the duke and said that it was time he should be indoors. Then, disengaging himself of his cartridge-bag, which he handed to a footman who had come out to announce tea, he proceeded, very slowly and carefully, to wheel the chair towards the castle.

Mrs. Townley was not perfectly satisfied. Since she had last seen this important young man he had apparently acquired a very disconcerting composure, a composure which, she felt, indicated stubbornness of will and great self-reliance. He was still rather stupid looking, still very inarticulate and unaggressive; but he was no longer the gentle and rustic youth who could have been so pleasantly and conveniently moulded by her powerful will.

What troubled her more than anything else, perhaps, was a smouldering fire in Herbert's small eyes and a certain proud firmness in the boyish mouth.

"The duke has been telling me, Herbert," she said, walking beside him at the back of the wheel-chair, while Isabel paused for a moment to pat the retriever, "that you did not like London."

"I didn't," he replied.

The duke laughed. "Babylon bored you, didn't it?"

"It did, sir; dreadfully."

"Ah," cried Mrs. Townley, "you will always be true to the North, Herbert. No Northcountryman can ever give his heart to a city."

"He ought to have been born a gamekeeper," said the duke.

Isabel came up at this moment and walked beside the old man, rescuing an end of the shawl over his shoulders which was dragging on the wheel.

"Isabel was not in the least bored by *her* tour," said Mrs. Townley; "but all the same, she is very glad to be back in the North country."

"I think I shall have to send Herbert on a foreign tour," said the duke. "How would you like that?" he asked, half attempting to turn about in the chair.

"Not at all, sir."

"It would bore you?"

"Dreadfully."

The duke laughed.

As they approached the castle Mrs. Townley said that she never saw the splendid old place without fresh admiration.

"But what would you say about it," chuckled the duke, "if you went down into the cellars and saw there enough '34 port and enough Waterloo brandy to last Herbert for fifty or sixty good roystering years? That's the foundation of the old castle—stacks of alcohol! I suppose you'd like me to pour it into the North Sea?"

"I should indeed, you wicked man!"

"Do you hear that, Herbert?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what do you think about it?"

"I suppose, sir, it would be rather a waste."

The duke laughed so that the chair rocked. "Come," he said, "you're not such a fool as you look. All the same, let me warn you against Mrs. Townley. She's a proselytiser. *Prends garde à toi!*"

IV

FROM a narrow corridor hung with mezzotints—*mezzotintos*, as the duke called them—they entered the great circular hall of the castle, with its vaulted roof and famous Renaissance chimney-piece, and so passed on into the library.

This noble apartment had been furnished by Thomas Chippendale the Second just before his work at Nostell Priory, and contained, in addition to the incomparable range of book-cases lining the walls, three of his finest writing-tables, topped with scarlet morocco, gold-tooled at the edges, and a set of chairs not to be matched in the whole country. Over one of the mantelpieces was a rather gallant portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds of the duke's grandfather, and, over the other, Gainsborough's greatest masterpiece—a portrait of the duke's grandmother at the time of her marriage.

Log fires were burning at either end of the room, and before one of these fires, under the portrait of Sir Joshua Reynolds,

tea was set out on a little table surrounded by comfortable arm-chairs, but with a space left in the centre for the duke.

When he had wheeled the old man into this space and removed his wraps, Herbert Stretton advanced to the tea-table and lowered the flame of the spirit-kettle. He then went away to wash his hands, his dog following him from the room.

"I am perfectly certain," said the duke, "that in some way or another Herbert is descended from an oyster."

"You are a naughty man," chided Mrs. Townley. "Nothing is more vexatious than a chatterbox, and nothing so restful as a good listener."

"How long is it," inquired the duke, "since Mr. Townley paid you that compliment?" He laughed a good deal over this joke, and blinked his eyes at the sparkling Isabel with considerable pleasure.

To Mrs. Townley this library, with its painted ceiling and its transomed windows, was impressive by reason of its great size; but to Isabel, who was beginning to realise the real tendencies of the æsthetic movement, the room had a deeper interest. She looked with understanding at the beautiful splats of the chairs, at the exquisite frets of the great writing-tables, at the graceful tracery of the range of bookcases, and at the fine simplicity of the Georgian silver on the tea-table.

Her mother, watchful of everything, in spite of her attention to the duke's comfort, remarked upon Isabel's interest in the furniture, and expressed the fear that the child would now never be satisfied till she had filled Cumberland with Chippendale and Sheraton.

"Well, a little restraint in the furniture of Cumberland," chuckled the duke, "might have a useful public influence. You may be sure that Mrs. Jellyby's furniture was as full of unrest as her children's stockings were full of holes."

He observed Isabel, as he fired this shot, with a sharp interest, and liked her for the smile that disturbed the pretty corners of her mouth. "I can see that you believe in restraint," he said: "your smile tells me so. You will never be a windbag or an organiser."

He began to speak about furniture. He told her that most of the offices in the castle were filled with Elizabethan oak, and that nearly all the bedroom furnishings were the walnut of Queen Anne.

"Here below," he concluded, "we live in the eighteenth century, with nothing but mahogany about us; and it was

that grandfather of mine over the mantelpiece, the friend of Chatham, Clive, and Burke, the man who said that all Lord Harcourt ever did for George the Third was to teach him to turn his toes out—it was he who had the good sense to realise that next to English walnut, which was exhausted by his time, there's no timber in the world so pleasant to live with as Spanish mahogany."

Herbert returned, his dog at his heels, and went straight to the tea-table, turning up the flame of the spirit-kettle, and beginning his preparations for making tea.

The duke proceeded to tell Isabel that this grandfather of his was one of the first men to discover Chippendale, and to set the fashion of making an intellectual rendezvous of the cabinet-maker's shop in St. Martin's Lane. "He used to go there of a morning, watch the apprentices at their work, listen to Dr. Johnson's talk, and walk away with Sir Joshua Reynolds to the studio in Leicester Square. He was in love with Lady Sarah Bunbury, and used to sit with her when Reynolds was painting her portrait. Herbert must show you the copy of that portrait which Reynolds made in secret for my grandfather. It's in the little bedroom he always occupied when he was here—the room he died in. A very fine portrait of a very beautiful woman. You'll see there, also, a pretty little kneehole desk—one of the nicest bits of walnut in the castle. It was at that desk he wrote his famous letter to Horace Walpole, pulling the coxcomb by the nose and holding up his taste in architecture and poetry to the contempt of mankind. My grandfather was reading Shakespeare and Ben Jonson when all his contemporaries were absorbed in Dryden and Pope. He never clipped a tree in his life, and, thank God, never built a grotto. Lord Chatham said of him that his taste was as incorruptible as his honour."

Herbert poured out the tea and handed the dishes. It was charming to notice with what care he attended to the duke, who could only just manage, and even then with the most painful difficulty, to lift his cup to his lips.

Mrs. Townley said that Isabel, she was sure, would like to see the portrait of Lady Sarah Bunbury, but, all the same, she had no intention of allowing her to become absorbed in art. "She must help me in my work. There is much to do in the world. And, first and foremost, she must learn how to manage a house. I am thankful to say she shows talent in that direction, and knows how to economise her

time, so that she need not neglect her music or her painting, and can also find time for riding and croquet."

The duke, who was warming up, and felt very glad to have people to talk to, said to Isabel, "Whatever you do, my dear, and I am sure you are a very talented young lady, do not allow your mother to make you a proselytiser. Have nothing to do with *movements*. There is only one movement in life, and that is provided for us by the law of nature. Things change of themselves. All other *movements* are the work of fussy people. Your mother is the most fussy person I ever met. She has got more money out of me than any other body in the world. And all that money has been wasted. Instead of making the world better, she and her *movements* only succeed in making it very much worse. Moreover, I assure you that she is a terrible humbug. She pretends to believe in a beautiful next world—I think she calls it Jerusalem the Golden—and yet if she were to be taken ill nothing would so frighten her as the thought of going there—and I don't wonder at it, a place with such a horrible name. But she professes to love the place. She sings about it—Je-ru-sa-lem-the-gold-en! But she don't want to die, by Jingo if she does! Whereas I, whom she must, as a good orthodox Christian, regard as a sinner doomed to dreadful punishment, have no fear of death whatever, and now only desire to hang on a bit longer in order to outlive the greatest scoundrel, the greatest traitor, and the greatest mountebank of the nineteenth century—old Gladstone."

Mrs. Townley, relieved by this end of the duke's exordium, exclaimed very piously, "Ah, the harm done by that wicked old man! And now, thanks to the Roman Catholic Irish vote, he is back as Prime Minister, with a majority of forty. But we'll have him out—we'll have him out. You wait a little."

"Well, I'm glad it's only a little," said the duke, "for, you see, my time's getting uncommonly short." He turned to Isabel, who looked at that moment in his thoughts very enviably fresh and pretty, and asked if she knew what were the last words of Jane Austen.

"A sister came to her, my dear," he said, "and inquired if there was anything she wanted. That was the question, 'Is there anything you want?' '*Nothing but death,*' said the sensible Jane. Dear Jane, dear Jane! One can imagine the smile that played over those fine lips as the words were uttered. '*Nothing but death.*' And that is the natural

answer any dying person would make to such a question, except people like Wesley, and General Booth, and your wonderful mother, who spend all their days in comparing the climate of heaven with the climate of the other place, but still, I notice, cling to this climate as the best of the three."

"Now, you wait!" exclaimed Mrs. Townley, smiling her brightest and lifting up a finger of admonition. "When Herbert and Isabel are admiring Lady Sarah Bunbury"—how clever was that reminder!—"I will read you a regular lecture."

The duke attempted to make a little mock bow in Mrs. Townley's direction. "I am immensely flattered, dear lady, let me positively assure you," he said, chuckling, "that you should feel a moment's interest in my soul; but, you must know, I am quite as interested in your mind, and if you read me a religious lecture I warn you I shall retaliate by reading you a political and philosophical lecture."

"Oh, no, duke, you shall not escape me in that clever manner!"

"But you will agree that a very old man who lives with an inarticulate great-grandson, and now seldom sees a soul from the outside world, has more right to hold forth, when he gets the opportunity, than a lady who divides her life between opening church bazaars and presiding over political meetings."

"You always make fun of me."

"Well, no; I am not so rude as that. Indeed, like everyone else, I regard you with a despairing admiration; but I do like, I must confess, to treat you now and then to a dose of your own medicine."

"What is my medicine, duke?"

"You are a born proselytiser, dear lady. You cannot be happy unless you are correcting other people."

"Oh, I hope not!"

"For their own good, of course. It is a form of egotism which is extremely interesting, and characteristic of our age. Everybody is trying to alter somebody else. It's an occupation. Let me try it on you."

"I shall be delighted."

"This Primrose League, for example."

"Surely, you do not——"

"It is a league founded to the honour of an upstart who betrayed the great cause which gave him the opportunity of reaching power. Dizzy attacked Peel over the Corn Laws with a virulence and a ruthlessness entirely praiseworthy;

he broke Peel ; and then what did he do ? He forsook the land and went clean over to the middle classes. He was a charlatan ; a clever charlatan, I admit, and an amusing charlatan, of course, which enabled him to outdazzle a pompous old windbag like Gladstone for a few years. But he was a traitor. Lord Derby, who was an intimate friend of mine, and who ought to have stuck either to his political guns or to his Greek translations, proved himself a weakling. He missed in 1855 the greatest opportunity ever offered to a brave man. But Dizzy was a traitor. Dizzy overpowered Lord Derby's will, and made him abandon Protection, and led him on until the whole cause of Conservatism was delivered into the hands of the middle classes. He coquetted with John Bright, and he coquetted with Gladstone. He would have sacrificed even Mrs. Brydges Willyam's thirty thousand pounds to get office, and sun himself in the smiles of Her Majesty. He vulgarised everything he touched—literature, architecture, gardens, politics, manners, even dress. And, with a fine irony, you now seek to perpetuate his memory and rehabilitate a discredited Tory Party, by means of a simple flower for which he never cared, and the patronage of an aristocracy so scatter-brained that it has forgotten he ruined it. Why don't you call yourselves the Peacock League, or even the Traitor's Bootblack Brigade ? ”

Herbert Stretton, who had removed the duke's cup and plate during this speech, now turned to Isabel and asked her if she would care to see the portrait of Lady Sarah Bunbury. Isabel rose with a slight blush, which made her look very pretty, and with a charming glance at the duke, as if she would say to him, “ *Au revoir*, you delightful old gentleman,” went before her old playfellow towards the door.

“ Do not be too long, dear,” called Mrs. Townley over her shoulder ; “ it is getting late, and the days are drawing in.”

“ I believe you're afraid of me,” said the duke, failing for once to catch the drift of Mrs. Townley.

V

ISABEL found that she had to do all the talking. As they crossed the hall she began to tell Herbert about her brothers, and as they went up the stairs she spoke about the shooting-parties at Cumberfield now being arranged.

"I'm afraid I do not like people," he said quietly. "Nothing bores me so much as a party."

She agreed that parties were dull, and said that she supposed he must have been to many in London.

"Enough for a lifetime, I assure you," he replied. "And the worst of it is," he added ruefully, "my Aunt Theresa, who nearly extinguished me in London, is coming here to organise more parties."

"Oh," cried Isabel, a little excitedly, "for your coming of age?"

"Yes. I think I shall run away. Beanfeasts are odious to me."

"I don't like ordinary parties, I confess," said Isabel; "but still, I do think you ought to have parties, and fireworks, for this particular birthday. I don't think, really, that you can expect to come of age *à l'insu de tout le monde*."

"I hate the thought of it."

"You don't like, I expect, having to be in the centre of the stage?"

"I think the whole idea is vulgar. It's a form of showing off."

He paused at a door, opened it, and made room for Isabel to pass in first. The portrait hung over the mantelpiece. While she was looking at it he stood at her side, but after she had finished her study of this beautiful Reynolds, and had turned away to inspect the writing-desk, he walked over to the casement windows and opened them, remaining there looking out on the park. The song of a thrush came from the trees below, and the deep, incessant sound of falling water from the other side of the castle.

"This is what I like," he said after a while, hearing her come towards him. "It's worth looking at, isn't it? One could never be tired of a place like this. Doesn't it smell good?"

She looked out between the mullions, seeing first the great cedars almost immediately below the windows, the broad terrace, the brief garden, and beyond the sunk fence, where a number of half-hidden foals were at play, the far-spreading pasture of the park, with its spreading trees, its copses, its acres of bracken, its feeding cattle, and its broad river flowing beside a rocky bastion crowned with elm, beech, and ilex. Beyond this tree-crowned bastion on her right rose the great wall of the northern moors, over which the sun, setting behind woods in the far distance and dazzling the windows of the castle with a rose-coloured flame, threw a faint and mysterious light that was neither gold nor green.

"It's a very real bit of England," said Isabel, from her window, half turning to look at his profile showing beyond the other window at her side. "It's beautiful beyond language. One can see how it has grown with the ages. I remember how I loved it when I first saw it, years and years ago now."

"It's a wonderful place to come back to. By gad, how good it was after London!"

"Did it remind you of coming back from school?"

"Yes, it was like that. No; it was ever so much better."

"I think," said Isabel, "that's a lovely phrase of yours about it being a wonderful place to come back to."

"Mind you, there's an awful lot of work to do in it," said Herbert, and began filling his pipe.

"I suppose there must be," replied Isabel; "though it looks a very finished picture, doesn't it?" She laughed softly, but he took no notice of her jest.

"An agent is never the same as the owner," he said musingly, as if he had something on his mind.

"No, I suppose not."

"You've got to love a place to get the best out of it."

"Yes, I'm sure of that."

"And I'll tell you something else."

"Yes?"

"You've got to like people to get the best out of them."

"You mean, one must be sincere to manage people successfully?"

"No; I mean you must like a person if you want to know him at his best. If you don't like a man you'll never get to know him."

He struck a match and lighted his pipe.

"That's true of books, too," said Isabel. "Unless you love an author you never understand his books."

Herbert nodded his head, throwing the match out of the window.

"I mean to devote my whole life to the place and to the people," he said quietly. "I like the people. We understand each other." He shut the window in front of him, the old glass in the casement rattling pleasantly in the leads. "Aunt Theresa shall never get me to London if I can help it," he added, closing the other window, from which Isabel had now withdrawn.

He looked up at the portrait of Lady Sarah Bunbury as they crossed the room. "Don't you agree with me," he said,

nodding towards the picture, "that those sort of people never get the best out of life?"

"Oh, I do."

"I'm glad of that," was his comment. "I saw scores of them in London. Poisonous people."

As they went down the corridor, "It's very nice to see you again, Isabel," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at her with calm eyes and a serious face. She greeted this look with a smile so natural and old-friendish that Herbert was encouraged to go on. "You were always one of the quiet sort, weren't you?" he said.

"Yes, I think I was."

"You've grown, by the way, into a jolly pretty girl."

They went down the stairs in a silence that thrilled her, and she waited almost in fear for his next words. As they reached the hall he said, "I expect your mother is beginning to wonder when we are coming back."

VI

ON their drive home through the twilight Mrs. Townley questioned her daughter, albeit discreetly, concerning her *tête-à-tête* with Herbert Stretton. But Isabel, who was sensitive and refined, shrank from those questions, and returned answers as brief and offhand as could escape a charge of positive rudeness.

The truth is, the meeting with Herbert Stretton, after a separation of more than a year, had awakened in her heart the unmistakable emotion of love. She wanted to be silent, and she wanted to be silent in order that she might dream, which is the exercise most natural to such love. She saw in him much more than the duke saw, and very much more than her mother saw. In her eyes, Herbert Stretton was a man, not a boy, and a very handsome man at that; he was also romantic—that is to say, different from other people. He made her think of Lord Byron. She found herself repeating the scornful line:

I have not loved the world, nor the world me,

recalling at the same moment the light in Herbert's dark eyes as he stood at the open window and told her how he had hated London.

There must have been any number of beautiful and clever girls surrounding him at those parties he had hated. Lady Theresa Grantham, his aunt, must certainly have tried to catch him for some brilliant girl in her circle. He would have been taken to all the great houses; he would have gone to Ascot and Goodwood; he would have sat beside Lady Theresa at the opera; he would have danced to the small hours of the morning; he must surely have met some of those dreadfully fast women of whom she had read in novels and about whom Miss Curtis had told her almost unbelievable things; he must, in fact, have been hemmed in on every side by temptations enough to ruin his soul, and yet he had come back to DurrIDGE, had told her how he hated it all, had called Londoners poisonous people, and had said to her, "It is very nice to see you again, Isabel."

She was a girl of her age, and began to wonder if some romance had befallen him while she was abroad, paining her heart a little with the notion that perhaps his seriousness, his austerity, his silence, his Byronic melancholy, were the woeful consequences of a desperate love for a woman who had rejected him. It did not occur to her that many men are born inarticulate, and that to be able to express oneself at all adequately is a difficult matter even for the most gifted. On the contrary, she believed that Herbert Stretton was at all points a wonderful person, and that if he chose, or perhaps if he were encouraged by someone who loved him, he might become as eloquent as Macaulay, as witty as Sheridan, as charming as Sir Joshua.

The horses, trotting smartly home through the chilling air, beat with their hoofs a cheerful *obligato* to these romantic thoughts, as if they knew well enough the true facts of the case, and could assure Isabel that Herbert Stretton was head over heels in love with her. Certainly Isabel recalled very often to her mind his particular look when he turned his face and said she had grown into a jolly pretty girl, and remembered with gratitude how satisfied had been the tone of his voice when he remarked that she had always been one of the quiet ones.

To dream of these things all by herself, shut up alone in her own room, became the first really intense longing which had ever disturbed the serenity of her well-ordered days. As soon as she could, then, she escaped from the caresses of her father, who adored her and was waiting in the hall to receive her, and, avoiding Miss Curtis, went upstairs to her room,

and there, after a long look at her reflection in the glass, sat down by the fire, and began to think it all out again.

What Mrs. Townley thought of her daughter's prospects may be gathered from a remark she made to Roscoe when the old nurse was restoring the Paris bonnet with the violet strings to the Victorian wardrobe.

"He loves her, Nanny. I haven't a doubt of that. Indeed, it is obvious. But whether he will ever be able to screw up his courage to tell her so is another matter."

"Ah, dear ma'am," cried Roscoe, rubbing her hands together, "if he is a wise young gentleman he will leave that to you."

VII

CUMBERFIELD, always busy, began to be very busy. Dog-carts, waggonettes, drags, and luggage-carts were going constantly to the station, returning with men in lively tweeds, who brought guns, fishing-rods, and sometimes a pointer or a retriever, with languorous ladies, too, in the latest autumn fashions, some of whom brought their children with them, and also with gentlemen's gentlemen, ladies' maids, and children's nurses.

To Mr. Christopher Townley the grouse season had always been one of painful distress. He did not shoot, and he did not fish. He took no interest either in hunting or racing. He found it difficult, therefore, to listen at the dinner-table, in the billiard-room, and in the smoking-room, to the drawling conversation of his tired and often yawning guests about birds and dogs, fish and flies, huntsmen and hounds, horses and jockeys. He knew the difference between driving grouse and shooting them over dogs; he knew that his moor was divided into half a dozen beats, and also what it cost him every year to keep going; moreover, he knew that brown trout were to be found in the upper reaches of his river and salmon in the lower; these bits of knowledge, picked up chiefly from his sons, he knew in a dim fashion, but, in spite of such knowledge, he could not enter intimately, much less with genuine sympathy, into the adventures of each day's sport, nor listen with any lively interest to discussions about Lord Lonsdale and Tom Firr, Buck Barclay and Martin, or to reminiscences concerning Cream Gorse, Kirby Gate, and Croxton Park.

He felt that his guests made far too much of the Cottesmore, the Quorn, the Belvoir, and the Pytchley ; he considered that they attached far too great an importance to the existence of people like Baron de Tuyle, Mr. Arthur Coventry, Captain Forester, Chicken Hartopp, Count Zabrowsky, Bay Middleton, and Captain Doggie Smith. He had himself no accusation to bring against these things or these people, but he was convinced, almost as a moral question, that his guests ought to be more serious about life, and should give their main attention to the affairs of Church and State, matters which they never appeared to consider.

On the present occasion, although the visit of grandchildren mitigated the old ironmaster's distress, he woke up suddenly and painfully to the existence of a new anxiety and a fresh responsibility in his life. He discovered that his adored Isabel, whom he still regarded as a little girl, was the object of great attention on the part of a number of men in his house. He realised, with a certain start of pain, that the child was marriageable. This perturbed him, and really hurt him ; but there was something more.

In years long past he had been well content to let his competent wife arrange the marriages of his tall sons ; but Isabel was the child of his old age, and was, besides, inexpressibly dear to him. He thought her the sweetest thing that ever lived certainly the most affectionate thing that had ever touched his toiling life ; and he began to wonder whether Georgina, with all her wonderful genius, was as sound a judge of a man as he was—a man really fit to marry his Isabel, one who would always be as kind and generous and grateful to her as a man bone-good certainly would be. Good men, he realised—really good men—are scarce indeed.

Further, he could not hide from himself the wretched thought that his dear wife entertained a slightly blind feeling of reverence for titles, and had become more and more disposed to overlook in a peer or a baronet habits and ideas which she would have been the first to reprobate or condemn in a gardener or a footman. He remembered that cards had never been played in Cumberfield for money till a certain earl came to stay with them, and that his wife's excuses for yielding to this nobleman's importunity for a stake had always seemed to him unmistakably thin. She still stood out, it is true, in the matter of wine at the table, but he took it for granted that she was aware of the fact that whiskey had crept into the smoking-room at night, and that certain of their guests paid

private visits to the butler's room before luncheon and before dinner. Georgina had certainly either broadened or weakened in recent years, and there was no doubt about it, he thought, that her interest in the social world was even greater than it had been when she was searching to find wives for their sons. That this dear wife of his, thus changing with the times, might arrange behind his back a marriage for Isabel of which he could not approve, became to him a thought which gradually made him watchful and unhappy.

It was well known that his sons were very rich men ; two of them, who had long ago set up as manufacturers of steel, were commonly supposed to be even richer than their father ; therefore it was clear that Isabel, an only daughter, would receive a large dowry, and inherit a considerable part of her father's estate. This meant that she was exposed, not only to the machinations of unscrupulous mothers with penniless sons, but to the skilful and cunning diplomacy of men who had wasted their substance in foolish ways and were now driven to repair their fortunes in order to avoid ruin. Of such men there were plenty in the county, and even one or two at Cumberfield.

In particular did the old ironmaster notice and dislike Anthony Holton, a baronet who lived some twenty miles from the city in which Mr. Townley had his ironworks, and whose mania for financial speculation had brought him just recently to very considerable straits.

Tall, fair haired, and grey eyed, with handsome features, a gentle voice, and a rather pawing manner, Anthony Holton, who had the bad habit of humming to himself as he walked about a room full of people, flattered clever women by treating them as his intellectual equals and sporting men by refusing to regard them as his intellectual inferiors. He could talk learnedly of shooting and hunting and fishing in the library, and intimately of the arts in the drawing-room. He played the piano sufficiently well to be accounted an excellent accompanist, and he spoke the French language with an ease and a charm which were usefully impressive. His popularity was considerable, chiefly among women, but of friendship he appeared to have no knowledge. He was like an ambassador, moving among all sorts and conditions, ingratiating himself with all, offending none, and keeping his own opinions entirely to himself.

Mr. Townley took care in the library or the billiard-room to seat himself as far away as possible from this curious

gentleman ; but, if Sir Anthony were not of the men's company, he would sometimes steal away to the drawing-room, and there keep an eye upon him. Nothing more fidgeted the old ironmaster than to see this suspect seated at the piano singing songs in a language he could not understand, but which were evidently love-songs, with his expressive eyes unmistakably directed to Isabel. Had not, indeed, one of his daughters-in-law said to him that there would soon evidently be a new marriage in the family ?

At last, unable to bear the matter on his conscience any longer, Mr. Townley spoke to his wife about Sir Anthony's financial bad habits.

"He may have an old name, my dear," he said gravely, "and he may own a good house ; but let me tell you in confidence that his bankers are not easy about him."

Mrs. Townley replied, "My dear Christopher, set your mind entirely at rest. I have decided already whom Isabel shall marry."

"And may I ask who that is ?" inquired the ironmaster, with something of a start, and not entirely without the tone of reproach in his voice.

"If I were to tell you you would think I was mad."

"I hope not," rejoined Mr. Townley, with his fingers in the pockets of his waistcoat.

"Well, it is someone of whom you think very highly, and one who will make her an excellent husband."

"If you are sure on that head, my dear, I am perfectly satisfied. Tell me who it is."

"Not for the world !" Mrs. Townley laughed, patting one of his cheeks. "No one must know it," she said ; "not a soul. I want the atmosphere to be perfectly free from any suggestion of arrangement. That would be fatal. They must fall naturally in love with each other. In the meantime, Sir Anthony Holton and others have their uses. They tend to create in Isabel the useful knowledge that she is attractive, and they may—at least, I hope so—bring it home to my young man that he is not Isabel's only admirer." At this point, glancing at the clock, she rang the bell for Roscoe.

"Well, I can't think who it is," replied Mr. Townley, moving away very thoughtfully, with his fingers still in his waistcoat pockets, "but I should like you to put Isabel on her guard against Holton. You know how to do those things better than I do. He is artistic and she is artistic. I have heard him praising her water-colours. A young girl, with

no knowledge of the world, may be taken off her guard by a man of that character."

"There is no need for me to warn her. Set your mind at rest. She is perfectly safe."

Mr. Townley paused at the door. "A fellow like that," he said, "is deucedly cunning. What's the word I want? He's insidious. In a way, too, he's impressive. And you never know what is in his mind."

The door opened noiselessly, almost knocking him back, and Roscoe came glidingly into the room.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I'm sure I do," she cried humbly.

"Come in, Nanny, come in," he said, catching her retreating figure by the arm. "We have been talking about your baby."

"Ah, bless her beautiful young heart, sir!" cried Roscoe. "She grows more lovely every day, and without losing any of her sweetness."

While he dressed for dinner that night Mr. Townley pondered those last words of Roscoe. To enter the world and to lose none of childhood's sweetness, was that really possible? He thought of all the faces he would presently see round his table, some of them the faces of his own sons; was there one among them who had kept even a mere shadow of that wonderful sweetness which was so overflowing in the faces of his grandchildren?

A hard place, this world; and, probably, if we knew the full truth, civilisation had made it harder still.

VIII

"I HOPE you are not going out with the guns to-morrow morning," said Mrs. Townley rather confidentially to Sir Anthony Holton.

"I was; but, of course, if——"

"I'll tell you why. Herbert Stretton is driving over to luncheon, and I should like you to take charge of him."

Sir Anthony bowed like a shopwalker, and smiled very engagingly as he made answer, "That is the most flattering thing you could say to me. I understand he's a complete rustic—one whom neither Venus can enchant nor Apollo amuse."

"Oh, I assure you he is a very good boy. A little heavy,

perhaps, but by no means stupid. I think you will like him. In any case, I can promise you that he will not bore you."

She looked round the crowded drawing-room, which was bright with shaded lamps and numerous candles, and which was cheerfully, perhaps one should also say richly, furnished in the most impressive Victorian manner, and felt a glow of satisfaction at the cunning of her diplomacy and the general success of her social life. She told herself that only the pencil of George du Maurier could do justice to the aristocratic character of her rooms and the distinguished appearance of her house-party.

"Even if he should bore me to death," said Sir Anthony, fingering his moustache, "I shall be most happy to do your bidding. By the by, I remember that my sister wrote to me from London about a month ago saying that the future Duke of Rothbury was regarded by everyone as the stupidest person in town."

"Ah, but London expects so much of people," Mrs. Townley replied with dignity, and also with authority. She caught sight of Isabel smiling very prettily as she talked to a handsome captain in the 10th Hussars.

"The supply meets that demand," said Holton. "The season grows more and more amusing. The only person society will not tolerate in these days is the person who contributes nothing to the general sum of human happiness."

Mrs. Townley suddenly gave him her complete attention.

"Yes, Sir Anthony," she said, with great emphasis, "but does that mean that society is getting better?" Then, in a lower and more confidential tone of voice, she added, "I hear of girls driving about the streets in hansom cabs with their partners between dances, some of them actually smoking cigarettes. Are those to be the future mothers of the English aristocracy?"

The wily baronet, who knew something about these matters, for he incessantly cultivated the friendship of the rich and insurgent classes of London society, would not commit himself. "I am told that such behaviour is not unknown, but I refuse to think it is general."

Mrs. Townley persisted in her charges. "I know on the best authority," she said, "that culture is quite tabooed, and that to be serious is to be voted a provincial. Everyone is frivolous. It's the fashion."

"In a certain set that is true; but the Old Guard has not surrendered, and never will. At least, I hope not."

"No, but their numbers are getting less every season. And what are we to expect when a man like Mr. Gladstone will not go anywhere unless Lady Dalhousie is of the party, and when women like Mrs. Cornwallis-West think it amusing to speak irreverently at dinner-parties, and when all the world is talking openly of the worship of beauty?"

"Well, I am not a pessimist in such matters. I think that excess of any kind destroys itself, and I am sure that things right themselves in the end."

"Oh, I think so too; but what frightens me, Sir Anthony, is the dreadful treatment of religion in these days. The rage for Mrs. Langtry, and the day of the professional beauty, may pass; but what will be the position of religion? I understand that one now very seldom finds the Bible in any bedroom, and that family prayers are almost entirely given up. If that is true—and I believe it is very largely true—it means the downfall of this country. I am certain of that."

"There is, I think," said Sir Anthony, who had not read the Bible for many years, and who never listened when it was read to him in church, "a general feeling that the whole of Europe is moving to some considerable catastrophe. One feels, don't you think, that a change is coming over human society? Perhaps it is merely *fin-de-siècle*; everything is *fin-de-siècle* now; all the same—well, I don't know. I am not very happy about the world. Ah," he exclaimed, getting up rather too gratefully, "I see I am wanted at the piano. Rely upon me," he added, turning and bending down to her, "to be at your beck all to-morrow." He walked across the room, smoothing the back of his long hair, and glancing rather reproachfully in the direction of Isabel.

Mrs. Townley turned to a lady on her other side. "I have been giving Sir Anthony a good talking-to about family prayers and daily reading of the Bible," she said.

"Ah, dear Mrs. Townley," exclaimed this lady, wrinkling up her face with the highest approval, "you are always helping everybody to keep up the good old customs of England."

Mrs. Townley laughed. "Well, I hope you won't be late for prayers to-morrow morning," she said brusquely, and turned to speak to another guest who had taken Sir Anthony's chair.

The guilty lady clutched at her arm and began a hasty and whispered explanation about sleeping badly in strange beds; but Sir Anthony had begun to play, and all she got from Mrs. Townley was a cheerful and emphatic "Nonsense!"

IX

MUCH to his chagrin—for he had a very good reason for wishing to establish a hold over Herbert Stretton—Anthony Holton found himself next day mysteriously sent with a message to one of Mrs. Townley's sons half an hour after the important boy had arrived at Cumberland.

"Sir Anthony," Mrs. Townley confided to Herbert Stretton, "is too much in the drawing-room for my liking. I am grateful to you, Herbert, for enabling me to get rid of him. I'm sure Isabel should be grateful, too. He pesters her to death. Oh, by the way, speaking of Isabel, there is someone here very anxious to meet you. Don't be alarmed. It's an old friend, a very old friend—our Nanny! You haven't forgotten her, I'm sure. She begged me to ask if you would like to go up to the old schoolroom. Isabel shall take you. There's no Sir Joshua on the wall, but you'll find the old table in the window at which Isabel used to draw, and you used to stand watching her. Do you remember that, Herbert? Ah, you were a charming little boy in those days. Don't let Nanny bore you. Just go up and shake her hand. It will give her such pleasure. Then we'll have an early luncheon, and Isabel shall drive you out to the moors immediately afterwards."

What wonderful dreams dazzled the mind of Mrs. Townley as she saw her daughter go out of the room with the future Duke of Rothbury! That a woman of her nature should dream at all was perhaps strange enough, but that she should entertain so great a dream, and never once be daunted by a fear of its fulfilment, was stranger still. Probably her religious enthusiasm helped her. She loved to think, reverently, that this marriage was predestined before the foundations of the earth were laid, and that Isabel was destined to save society from paganism, and to revive in the new century that great earnestness concerning religion which had glorified the middle years of Queen Victoria's reign. Certainly she never thought of Isabel as a fashionable figure. Always her vision of the sweet child took the spiritual form of a moral influence.

Roscoe was standing by the hearth of the old schoolroom when the young people entered. Except that she now wore a black dress and a black apron, in place of the brown holland dress and the white apron which he perfectly remembered, everything in the room came to Herbert with the pleasant

greeting of the familiar. Nor did the change in Roscoe's dress disturb him with the sense of unwelcome change. Her pale face, so solemn and yet so kind; her ample fair hair sprinkled with grey and combed straight back from the forehead; her knuckly old hands holding a ball of wool, a shawl in the making, and steel knitting-needles; her cooing and deferential voice; above all the swift, friendly, and yet nervous smile which lighted up her face as he approached her with his hand outstretched—all these well-remembered associations with the old Nanny of Cumberland brought such pleasure to Herbert that, although his face remained as blank and impassive as ever, he gave Roscoe's hand an almost hearty shake, addressed her as "Nanny," and said that he was glad to see her.

"Nothing is changed, sir, in the old room, is it?" she said to him, slightly drawing back towards the hearth. "It's my room now, Master Herbert; but I keep it just as it was when my dear young lady was a child, and sat at that table learning her French and drawing her maps. And she comes here now very often; don't you, miss?—comes to see her old Nanny, and to look out of the window, and to run her eyes over the books on the old shelf. And sometimes—will you believe it?—she comes here—yes, Miss Isabel, I must tell him—to make toffee on the old fire, just as she used to do eight years ago. We move away the tall fender, poke up the fire till there's no smoke, and sit on the hearthrug listening to the boiling of the saucepan."

"How very jolly!" said Herbert.

"And sometimes, sir," continued Nanny, "although it's a great secret, and must be told to no one outside the family, she sits down on the carpet there, opens the door of her old doll's house, and—well, I won't say she plays with the things, but she looks at them. Why, I declare, there's something there," she cried suddenly, putting down her knitting on the chair she had been occupying, and going quickly but noiselessly over to the doll's house, "which you gave her, sir!" She opened the great door, and very carefully drew out of the divided interior a kitchen dresser loaded with plates and dishes. "There, look at that! Do you remember it, sir?"

"I'm afraid I don't, Nanny."

"I'd quite forgotten it, too," said Isabel, taking the dresser into her hands. "Are you sure about it, Nanny?"

"Sure about it, Miss Isabel? As if I forget anything about you two blessed children! Excuse me, sir. An old servant's

tongue runs away with her. Yes, miss, Master Herbert brought that over (his dear mother was alive in those days) on your fifth birthday; and her ladyship brought you"—the old woman went to a cupboard at the end of the room—"this beautiful big doll in her lovely pink dress, and likewise a new book that had just come out, called *Helen's Babies*. Oh, I remember that very well. And I'll tell you something else, miss; about that time I can remember his Grace driving over here one day with Master Herbert and a very fine, handsome gentleman who was fond of fishing, and I can remember that gentleman telling my dear lady in this very room that he was painting a portrait of the good Lord Shaftesbury in London. And who do you think he was, with his side-whiskers and his curly hair? He was Sir John Millais, who painted 'Bubbles,' and was made a baronet."

"Do you remember any of these things?" Isabel asked Herbert, smiling and amused.

"Not very much," he replied blankly.

"You were only six years old, sir," said Roscoe, "and my young lady was only five; but all I've told you is as true as the Bible, believe me."

"I'm sure it's truer than Jonah and the whale," said Isabel, putting her arm round Roscoe's waist and kissing the old woman's forehead. "And now I suppose we ought to go downstairs."

"Just one minute, miss," cried Roscoe, with sudden energy. "There's something in the night nursery, if I can find it, that I'd dearly love to show to Master Herbert."

"Well, don't be long, Nanny."

She hurried from the room, carefully shutting the door which they had left open. Arrived in the night nursery, however, she did nothing more active than sit down in an arm-chair. "I'll give them five minutes," she said, and looked at the little old silver watch in her waistband.

Those five minutes were spent by Herbert and Isabel in looking out of the window over a back garden, towards the stables and the buildings of the home farm. He told her that he was not particularly fond of shooting-parties, and suggested that after luncheon he would rather go over the Cumberfield farm than drive up to the guns on the moor. He asked her about the cattle on the farm, and who looked after things, and whether any of her brothers took a serious interest in farming.

Roscoe knocked discreetly on the door before entering.

She entered with an apology for having failed to find what she had gone in search of. "It's not often," she concluded, "is it, miss, that I can't lay my hands on anything I want in this house?"

"What was it you wanted, Nanny?"

"Ah, miss, I shan't tell you till I can find it! Wait till Master Herbert comes over next time, and then I'll show it to him."

They went down the stairs together. "I hope poor old Nanny didn't bore you," said Isabel.

"Do you know," he replied, fingering his immature moustache, "I much prefer talking to people like that than to other sorts of people?"

"Oh, so do I," she exclaimed. "They're so much more real."

He turned to her with gratitude. "That's exactly what I mean," he said, with a moment of vivacity. "They're so much more real. You never feel that they are acting."

X

THERE was considerable talk in Cumberfield about this visit of Herbert Stretton, particularly as he had not gone up to the moor. It was not long before Mr. Townley, putting two and two together, arrived at the startling conclusion that here was his wife's secret.

He was not thrown off his balance by this discovery, being a firm-footed man who had survived more than one serious industrial crisis; but his ponderous mind was by no means long in coming to the decision that his wife was preparing for herself, and perhaps even for Isabel, which was ever so much worse, a very great disappointment.

But, when he approached the subject with Mrs. Townley, her immediate reception of his awkward advances was so composed and even cockahoop that he was really startled. She smiled very confidently, begged him not to interfere, warned him against breathing a word of the matter to anyone, particularly to one or two of their own daughters-in-law, and assured him that before the year was out Isabel would be engaged to the duke's heir.

Mrs. Townley's confidence, however, was founded on nothing more solid than a remark made to her by Herbert Stretton before he got into his dog-cart to drive back to Durrige. As we have intimated, he had not gone up to the

moor after luncheon, but instead had paid a visit to the home farm with Isabel, and it was on the return from this visit, when he had already shaken hands with her, and while a footman was taking his gun to the dog-cart at the door, that he had turned round, looked her quite bravely in the eyes, and made the remark which so satisfied her ambitious mind and her motherly heart. He said, "Isabel hasn't altered a bit"; and then, "I'm awfully glad about that."

Mrs. Townley had masked her joy at this remark, and had merely said to him, in her brisk and friendly way, but with just that confidential tone which long experience had taught her would strengthen a nervous young man in the first stages of love, "You must come again, Herbert; we are always delighted to see you." In secret, however, her emotions were in eruption.

Now that the matter was as good as settled, Mrs. Townley laid all the emphasis of her satisfaction in colloquies with Roscoe on the moral aspects of Herbert Stretton. He might have been the son of an ordinary gentleman occupying a suburban place in the social life of the nation for all the reference she made to his position. No, what she wanted Roscoe to understand was the moral satisfaction of this match. Herbert had been flung into the fiery furnace of modern London, and had emerged without one hair of his head being singed. The sirens of Belgravia had sung to him, the nymphs of Mayfair had beckoned to him, and he had held resolutely on his homeward course. Parliament was at his feet; Westminster Abbey could assure him of an honourable tomb; fame, honour, glory, all were his for the asking; and he had turned his back upon it all, turned his back upon the World, the Flesh, and the Devil—why? Because he was good. Yes, good from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. A true Christian.

She told Roscoe of Herbert's devotion to the duke. Had he not withstood Mrs. Townley's suggestion that he should stay to tea on the momentous day of his visit only because he wanted to get back to his great-grandfather? "He always likes me," he had said, "to pour out his tea." How touching that was! How beautiful! Then there was his equal devotion to the people on the DurrIDGE estate. Mrs. Townley had heard that he could not do too much for these people; also she had heard that they worshipped him; and, marvellous to relate, it was even said that he had decided to build new cottages for the colliers and quarrymen, who were the most

ungrateful people, as everybody knew, in that part of England.

As if this were not virtue enough for the prospective husband of Roscoe's Miss Isabel, Mrs. Townley invented for him an implicit faith in the Christian religion, an undying loyalty to the Church of England, and so great a respect for the cause of temperance that he might almost be called a disciple of Sir Wilfrid Lawson.

"It's as if, Nanny, all my prayers, ever since she was a baby in her cot, have been heard in heaven. It's as if God had specially prepared this young man to be my darling's husband."

Her faith was sufficient to withstand a whole week without a second visit from Herbert; and, even when she felt it was time to take action, ten days after that visit, her confidence remained as great as ever.

"DEAR HERBERT (she wrote to him),—If the duke is well enough, *but not unless*, I should like you to show him the enclosed pamphlet about adult education; it shows so clearly, *I think*, how the movement is capturing the best of the working classes, who would be perfectly satisfied with their lot if only the *agitators* would leave them alone and Mr. Gladstone would not flatter them; but don't trouble him in the matter if you think it would fidget him in the least degree.

"The house is now empty of its guests, I am glad to say, and we are resuming so thankfully our normal life of peace and quietness.

"Nanny still talks of your visit to the schoolroom!

"Yours sincerely,

"GEORGINA TOWNLEY."

By return of post came his answer, written in a boyish copperplate:

"DEAR MRS. TOWNLEY,—My grandfather is very well, and is very much obliged to you for sending him the pamphlet. I am very busy with a rather big building scheme. Please tell Nanny I liked my visit to the schoolroom very much.

"With kind regards,

"Yours sincerely,

"HERBERT STRETTON."

For three days this letter lay heavy indeed on the hopes of Mrs. Townley, but she kept her anxiety bravely to herself, and continued her many philanthropic activities with a cheerfulness which inspired a great number of hardworking and unselfish social workers with helpful enthusiasm.

At the end of those three days her faith and courage were rewarded by a visit from Herbert. He rode over to Cumberland soon after breakfast to ask Mrs. Townley if she would come to luncheon on the following day, and whether she would bring Isabel and Nanny as well. Many and important were Mrs. Townley's engagements for the next day; moreover, she had boasted for forty years that she had never disappointed anyone, from the Archbishop of York to the humblest servant of the Dorcas Society or the Ragged School Union; but on this occasion, after one flashing moment for thought, she had said with the friendliest smile, "Yes, Herbert, I am sure we can manage it."

Once again the sun shone full in the heavens for this industrious woman, and the whole creation seemed to her visibly held in the everlasting arms of an all-wise Providence.

XI

WHEN the guests arrived at Durridge on the following day, Nanny, who was overwhelmed with nervousness, was spirited away by a footman to the housekeeper's room, while Mrs. Townley and Isabel were conducted through the hall and down a corridor to a small and sunny morning-room on the eastern side of the castle, a circular apartment in one of the towers.

Here they found the duke, looking very grave and irritable, and a lady of vast proportions, who was talking to him with excessive and rather breathless volubility. At their entrance the duke's face slowly brightened. He nodded his head to them, exclaimed, "Ah, here you are!" and, as they crossed the room, attempted to project his right hand in their direction. The lady who had been talking to him withdrew a pace or two, and stood against the mantelpiece, studying the visitors with a curiosity that was almost brutal.

She was Lady Theresa Grantham, Herbert's dreaded aunt, who had arrived at Durridge the day before from a visit in Yorkshire to arrange with the duke for the coming-of-age celebrations in November. This impressive person had an immense face, an immense bosom, and, as if that were not

enough, she became even more immense as she continued downwards, until the ends of her skirt described a circle of almost unbelievable dimensions.

The habitual expression of her large white face, with its pale eyes, small aquiline nose, and voluminous chin, was a stare of the most insolent character. One might have thought that a lady of her humorous and almost distressing bulk would have been painfully self-conscious, wishful to keep in the background, and anxious to placate by modesty and gentleness anyone who might observe her. On the contrary, Lady Theresa walked the earth as if its chief places and its most noticeable front rows were hers by right divine; and not only this; she had the habit of regarding all people presented to her, no matter how beautiful or how eminent, in a manner which suggested that in her eyes they were physically imperfect, intellectually uninteresting, and socially contemptible.

Although she still wore her hair in a manner no longer fashionable, and although she had been as loyal a wife as Queen Charlotte, and as careful a mother as Queen Victoria, she had now placed herself at the head of a younger generation which openly flouted the conventions, and flung itself into a hedonism which was as startling to most people of Lady Theresa's age as it was disturbing to all people of taste and judgment. Law-abiding in herself, but selfish and arrogant, this elderly lady encouraged in young people an attitude towards life which was destructive of all its reverences, and saw in their behaviour only a spirit which was highly amusing.

She received the confidences of any number of girls whose licence had got them into scrapes; she listened with a huge enjoyment to the smoking-room stories of elderly bucks; and she encouraged boys to tell her tales about their adventures with Gaiety chorus girls. Aware of all the scandal in society, which she would discuss quite openly before her servants, she backed horses, played cards for money, and drank far more whiskey than was good for her.

All the confident joy and brisk cheerfulness went out of Mrs. Townley's heart when she realised that Lady Theresa had arrived at the castle, and even Isabel, who only dimly remembered her, was conscious of an unnerving depression at the first sight of this dislikeable old woman. To both mother and daughter, entering that pretty room, it was as if they had met with an Arctic rebuff from some old friend whose welcome had ever been as genial as a summer day, and this before Lady Theresa had touched their hands.

The entrance of Herbert a few minutes afterwards, who came into the room with Anthony Holton, helped in some measure to relieve this unhappy strain, but it was nevertheless clear that the duke was peppery, that Herbert was sullen, and that Lady Theresa was determined to make herself felt in a fashion as unpleasant and dominating as possible.

Luncheon was served in the breakfast-room, a friendly apartment amply large enough for so small a party. A bright fire burned in a steel grate standing on the hearth, framed by a simple but very beautiful mantelpiece by Adam. Engravings in black and gilt frames decorated the walls; shield-back chairs, with honeysuckle and husk carving, were set round the table. Three long windows lighted this charming room, and Lady Theresa was careful to take a seat on the duke's left, with her back to their light. Two footmen, under the butler's watchful eye, waited on the party, and the butler, standing beside a leather screen at the end of the room, only came to the table when it was necessary to assist the duke.

"If I remember rightly," said Lady Theresa very pompously, looking across the table to Mrs. Townley, "you used to be active in good works." A pale smile flickered across her white face. "Are they—er—still flourishing?"

"Oh, I hope so."

She turned to the duke. "I hope, George, you will not ask any bishops, or people of that sort, for Herbert's celebrations. There is no one who can so effectually put a damper on a house-party as a clergyman. What you want is a lot of lively young people. If you give me *carte blanche* I will see that you have them."

"My cousin," said the duke to Mrs. Townley, "thinks that Herbert and I are both being snuffed out by dullness."

"You are living," said Lady Theresa, "in an age which has entirely past away. This castle is not even like a crematorium; it's far too cold for that. No; it is like a family vault."

"It's by your own choice, my dear, that you are sitting as far away from the fire as possible," said the duke, not without a wink of his bright eyes; "but, all the same, you are a wonderful woman, Theresa. I really think you have got the secret of eternal youth."

"The secret of youth is youth," said Lady Theresa, busy with her fork. "If you want to grow old live with old people." She ate with a decided vigour, as if championing her

food in that manner would advertise to the world the possession of splendid teeth.

"But Herbert found your young people in London very depressing. They very nearly made an old man of him."

"That's perfectly true, sir," said Herbert. He looked at Isabel. "Did I tell you about it?" he asked.

"Well, you told me you were bored," answered Isabel.

"Ah, I thought I had told you. Yes, I was dreadfully bored."

"My dear George," said Lady Theresa, with a glass of whiskey-and-syphon half way to her lips, "Herbert is not a natural young man, and you are making him even more unnatural by keeping him up here in this dreadfully cold castle and this hopelessly dull country. Let me remind you that when you were his age——"

"George the Third hadn't been dead a year," interrupted the duke. "That's a long time ago, my dear, isn't it?" he added, glancing at Isabel, who had turned to him at the sound of his voice.

"It seems a very long time to me," said Isabel nervously, feeling the presence of Herbert's formidable aunt on her immediate right.

Lady Theresa swept her with a contemptuous downward glance, and then arraigned Mrs. Townley. "I hope," she said, across the table, taking a piece of toast from a rack in front of her, "I hope you do not intend to keep this nice girl of yours in the country. The country is suffocation to young people." She munched noisily.

"Oh, I assure you, Lady Theresa, we find plenty to do at Cumberfield," said Mrs. Townley, relieved by this praise of Isabel and not knowing what she was letting herself in for.

Her remark provided Lady Theresa with the opportunity she desired. That old lady, pushing her plate away from her and resting her folded hands on the table as she leaned forward, began to hold forth in a petulant and scornful fashion on the selfishness of old-fashioned parents in keeping their children tied to their apron-strings. Nothing could be worse for children, she announced. No parents were more cruel to their children than religious parents, who were always saying "Don't do this," and who expected their unfortunate sons and daughters to take an interest in missionary societies and all that sort of antiquated nonsense.

A footman had difficulty in removing her plate, but she remained in the same attitude, letting him lean over her

enormous shoulder, and continued her diatribe. "Youth has its rights. This age is determined to assert those rights. I have encouraged I can't tell you how many girls to revolt against their absurd mothers, and boys to revolt against their tiresome fathers. Why should the best years of their lives be sacrificed to the ridiculous crotchets of their stupid old parents? Why? Nature tells them to desire pleasure, and encourages them to seek adventure. They have a right to every experience. To keep them in some of the homes of this benighted country is tantamount to shutting them up in monasteries and nunneries."

The duke chuckled, Anthony Holton nodded his head very sagely and yet rather sadly, and Mrs. Townley, who was scandalised, endeavoured to interrupt with a pious criticism. But Lady Theresa, after swallowing some more whiskey-and-syphon (she always pronounced it *see-fo-n*), swept forward again.

One must face facts. The old days of bigotry and intolerance were dead and done for. She had been brought up to believe in Adam and Eve, and all that sort of positive rubbish. People knew now that this tiny planet was not the centre of the universe. They no longer believed in a Providence. Darwin, in fact, had destroyed the entire foundations of theology, had blown them up sky-high. We were a funny sort of animal, cousins of the apes, and the only rational thing for us to do was to play about in the jungle of civilisation and enjoy ourselves as much as we could, instead of babbling about the crystal floor of heaven or shuddering over the undying flames of that dreadful other place.

She made small work of the sweet, to which she had lavishly helped herself with two plunges of the spoon into the dish firmly and apprehensively held by a footman who knew her athletic powers. She continued on her way, wiping her mouth almost fiercely with her napkin.

"There is no book in my drawing-room," she said, "so amusing to young people—I keep it there solely for that purpose—as Gustave Doré's illustrations to Dante's *Inferno*. You have no idea how my young guests shriek with laughter over it. I tell you that to show you how things have changed. My father and mother would have shuddered over that book. The young people of to-day shriek with laughter over it. And that's another matter. Books. Why should children be prevented from reading modern novels? Ruskin made prigs of people, and Matthew Arnold is doing the same thing,

with his ridiculous talk of culture and Philistines. I've no patience with intellectual priggishness. People should read what they like, and do what they like." She looked across the table to Anthony Holton. "I hope you agree with me," she said decisively, as if he were the one intelligent person in the room.

"Well, I must confess——" he began; but Mrs. Townley had now rallied her energies, and could no longer suffer in silence the monstrous onslaught of this wicked old woman.

"It will be a *terrible* day for England," she said very solemnly, with an emphatic nod for the adjective, "when the aristocracy of this country ceases to set a proper example to the people. And how can they set a proper and high-minded example to the people," she demanded, "if they turn their backs on the Bible and live like the savages of Darkest Africa?"

"But, my dear lady," answered her assailant, as Mrs. Townley pretended to regard the sweet in her plate, "it is not a case of people turning their backs on the Bible; it is a case of science taking the Bible out of their hands and giving them a volume of Huxley in its place."

"And sending Bradlaugh to Parliament!" said Mrs. Townley, beginning to tremble with indignation.

"But—er—tell me," said Lady Theresa, looking at Mrs. Townley as if that good lady herself were a savage from Darkest Africa; "you don't believe, do you, in a Fall of Man, and all that sort of thing?"

"I believe in God," said Mrs. Townley, laying down her fork.

"Oh, well, really, that is a matter I am unable to discuss, for I know nothing about it. Do you, George?"

"But you are surely not an *atheist*?" persisted Mrs. Townley. Into that word she put enough scorn to sink an ironclad.

Lady Theresa became politeness itself. "I am afraid I find your terms as old-fashioned as your theology," she replied. "We call ourselves agnostic. That is to say, we don't attempt to lay down the law about matters obviously beyond our understanding. You see, Mrs.—er—Mrs. Townley, the whole spirit of this age is one of freedom. We feel that we should be ridiculous if we told people what they are to think and how they are to behave. We do not know ourselves. The experts themselves do not know. All they know is that we are not fallen angels, that's quite certain, and that we

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are related to a section of tree-climbing animals. History, we have come to see, is chiefly a record of the superstitions of very ignorant people who lived in dark forests and trembled during a thunderstorm."

"A very vigorous intellect!" exclaimed the duke, chuckling.

"A very *dangerous* intellect," said Mrs. Townley. "I must say that—I really must."

"Your attitude towards modern opinion," Lady Theresa observed, studying with immense satisfaction the deep annoyance in Mrs. Townley's face, "strikes me as very like—very like indeed—the attitude of the Popes towards people like Galileo and Luther. I am sure that if you had lived in those days you would have burned Galileo and put Luther on the rack. I am quite sure, also, that you have never read the *Origin of Species*, or any of the books of Professor Huxley."

Mrs. Townley was altogether so indignant, especially at the thought that she could ever have put Martin Luther to the rack, that she was incapable of further speech. She gave Lady Theresa a look of angry defiance and searching scorn, and then glanced over her head towards the windows, silent as a cloud. She was determined not to say another word.

Thus was the terrible Lady Theresa left in possession of the field, entirely triumphant, and eminently satisfied at having reduced a provincial friend of the duke to complete silence. But the battle was not yet over.

Herbert had been telling Isabel, during this dispute, about his building scheme, and had promised to show her some of the plans after luncheon; but Lady Theresa's pompous voice had sounded across his brief sentences; the feeling of strain at the table had become increasingly greater to Isabel; occasionally, too, Anthony Holton had looked sympathetically across at her, as if sorry that she should witness the humiliation of her mother; and, finally, Isabel had half turned to Lady Theresa and, neglectful of Herbert, had listened to the last passages of the fight.

She was greatly nervous; but she loved her mother, and could not bear—for she was a very affectionate child—to appear as if indifferent to her mother's unhappiness; moreover, she felt instinctively that in Lady Theresa she had a mortal enemy, who would laugh at her romance and even ruin her life without a scruple of any kind. She felt, too, that she and her mother were suffering in the duke's eyes,

and that she might perhaps suffer in Herbert's eyes if Lady Theresa were left so completely in possession of the field. Thus, in spite of her nervousness, she raised her face to the old woman, and said, "I don't quite understand, Lady Theresa, what you mean by saying that people are to think what they like and do what they like."

"That is because," returned the old woman, still thinking of Mrs. Townley, "your mother has suppressed you. You think what you have been taught to think. You cannot imagine thinking for yourself. Freedom is unknown to you. Ah, what a delicious smell. Coffee! Coffee always makes me wish I had learned to smoke as a girl."

"What I mean," said Isabel, gathering courage as she went along, though her voice still trembled, filling the room with a sense of real crisis, so that the duke leaned forward a little and listened intently, "what I mean is, how could society continue as an organism if everybody were free to think and do what they like? There must, surely, be some laws, some standards. We couldn't leave the individual grocer to decide how much tea should go to the pound, or the individual policeman to decide whether murder is a crime."

"Will someone have the goodness to tell me," cried Lady Theresa, screwing away from the girl, "what is an *organism*? I suppose I knew once, but I have clean forgotten it. My dear child," she continued, screwing back to Isabel, and looking down upon her from her exalted altitude, "the existence of society is a matter for the policeman and the magistrate; what I have been discussing is intellectual freedom."

She helped herself to coffee at this moment, as if she had finished the discussion. "Pray smoke, Herbert, if Mrs. Townley does not mind, for I love the smell of tobacco."

The duke said, "The young lady hasn't done with you, Theresa. It's her innings now."

Isabel did not wince. "But surely laws are the creation of intellect," she said quietly. "And even in matters of taste, certainly in matters of art," she added, helping herself to coffee, "there must be standards. Michael Angelo turned away from Greek standards, but he went to nature for new ones."

"Good God, George," exclaimed Lady Theresa, screwing round to the duke, "have I stumbled on a blue-stocking?"

"Apparently you have caught a Tartar," chuckled the

duke. "I advise you to re-load, Theresa, and prepare to receive cavalry. Continue, Isabel. Hang on to her!"

"Isabel is *not* a blue-stocking," said Mrs. Townley, "but she has disciplined her mind, and never speaks foolishly or at random."

"How tiresome of her!" laughed Lady Theresa.

Isabel heard a quick whisper from Herbert while Lady Theresa was uttering this exclamation. "Go on," he said encouragingly. How thrilling to feel that he admired her!

The duke said, "I want to hear the end of this argument. All young people, apparently, do not think as you would have us suppose, Theresa."

"London would soon cure her," answered the old woman very knowingly. And then to Isabel, curtly and contemptuously, "What were you going to say?"

Isabel did not want to continue. She was rather distressed at finding herself in such unusual prominence. She had no fear of defeat in the argument, for she was certain Lady Theresa's intellect was merely shallow and flippant; but she was unhappy all the same. However, encouraged by Herbert's whisper and the duke's evident sympathy, she shot another arrow of good sense into Lady Theresa's ramshackle thesis of life.

"I think I was only going to say," she began, "what you yourself have admitted, Lady Theresa."

"What have I admitted?" This blankly, as if addressing the opposite wall.

"That liberty can only exist in a society which acknowledges law."

"Well, of course."

"But that implies, doesn't it, that a majority must be on the side of the good?"

"On the side of law."

"But a majority on the side of badness," persisted Isabel, with a smile that pleased everyone save Lady Theresa, "would not make good laws."

"They wouldn't make inconvenient laws. They wouldn't be so stupid. At least, I hope not."

The duke cut in. "I see what she means. You've missed the point, Theresa. The child is seeing the end of your campaign."

Isabel said, with a certain amount of force, "Good laws would be inconvenient to bad people. What I mean can best be illustrated, I think, by asking Lady Theresa if she

would employ a lady's maid who thought it old-fashioned and superstitious to be honest——"

"Or a butler who drank her whiskey!" laughed the duke.

"Or," said Herbert, from the other end of the table, "a solicitor who embezzled her money."

"Ah, I'm sure she wouldn't do that, Herbert!" laughed the duke, in a fashion which made his victim wince, for she was something of a screw.

Herbert leaned towards Isabel. "Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked her, as if to show that he took no notice of his aunt's wishes.

"Upon my word, I haven't the least notion," blustered Lady Theresa, "what you are all driving at. You seem to me quite up in the clouds. I prefer to keep my feet on the solid earth."

"No wonder!" laughed the duke, and continued laughing for some time.

"I was only trying to point out," said Isabel, "that standards of some kind are essential. The other question is, Which standards are best for society? Is temperance better than excess? Is consideration for others better than self-assertion? Are sympathy and kindness better than egotism and selfishness?"

She looked quite beautiful as she fired these questions at Lady Theresa. Without losing any of the cool composure which was so characteristic of her simple beauty, ardour in argument gave a flash of animation to her clear young eyes which was extremely becoming.

Lady Theresa would have interrupted, but Isabel was now determined to get in her last shot. She said quietly but emphatically, "Standards must be set up by the best people, not the worst. It wouldn't be a very agreeable state of things, obviously, if the criminals in England asserted their right to think what they like and do what they like. One sees something of what that state of mind can lead to in the case of the Irish moonlighters."

"Exactly!" cried Mrs. Townley.

"Hear, hear!" said Herbert under his breath.

"And besides, Lady Theresa," continued Isabel, carried away by the sympathy of the others, "I am sure that no great man from the beginning of history has ever taught individualism in ethics. And I can't think of anyone who has ever suggested that society could exist unless people acknowledge the moral law, and practise self-restraint. So we aren't

really as benighted in these regions as you appear to think. I mean, we have got all the greatest people who have ever lived on our side ; while the young people in London of whom you have spoken—well, I really don't know whom they have on their side, except the Nihilists of Russia."

"And the moonlighters in Ireland," said Mrs. Townley.

Everyone at the table looked towards Lady Theresa.

"It is really amazing," said that annoyed old aristocrat, with the most wintry of her smiles, putting her napkin on the table and making signs of her intention to rise from the table, "how difficult it is to get a new idea into heads that are turned over the shoulder. However, enough of argument. George, if you spend many more days in serious discussions you'll become an old man before your time."

"Very good, Theresa ; very good indeed," laughed the duke, as Herbert turned his wheel-chair from the table ; "but, all the same, you've met your Waterloo ; there's no doubt about that." As he left the room he called after her, as she stumped ahead of them, "However, your side will win. Rousseau will always beat Burke, in spite of the Duke of Wellington. Democracy is heading straight for anarchy."

They went into the hall and stood about the duke's chair in front of the fire, Lady Theresa talking to Anthony Holton, Mrs. Townley talking to Isabel, and Herbert talking to the duke.

"I'm going to take Isabel down to the office, sir, to show her the plans of the new cottages," said Herbert.

"Well, don't keep her too long," replied the duke under his breath ; "she worries the old woman so beautifully."

Herbert went to Isabel. "Will you come down to the office? Will it bore you?"

"No, I am most anxious to see your plans."

As they moved away from the group, Lady Theresa, who had heard every word of the young people, very slowly raised her eyes and looked over Anthony Holton's shoulder at Mrs. Townley. She continued speaking to Holton, but her eyes said to Mrs. Townley as plain as words could make it, "Oh, so that is what you are at, is it? Actually as big game as that. Well, we'll see."

Mrs. Townley, who now had no fear of Lady Theresa, met the old woman's threatening stare with a smile of the utmost good nature, and then, walking up to the duke's chair, began to talk about Nanny.

"Ah, she must come and shake my hand," said the duke.

"I remember her very well. A nice body. Yes, we'll send for her; but presently; when Theresa has gone to lie down. I like your girl. She has got more spirit than I thought. A rare nice girl."

XII

ONE of the grave dangers of living in the country, according to Lady Theresa Grantham, is the mooning or dawdling habit it induces in the mind.

People who avoid civilisation—by which she did not mean, apparently, either culture or industry—and who live in almost unbroken communion with nature—by which she meant, so far as one could understand the working of her mind, ground that is wet underfoot and the conversation of curates—become in course of time not only deaf to the battle-cries of advancing humanity, that is to say, the latest fad or craze of an irresponsible society, but blind to terrible pitfalls under their own noses.

She was convinced for example, that her cousin the duke had no notion at all of Mrs. Townley's insolent and preposterous ambition to marry her upstart daughter to the duke's heir. It was plain that he saw nothing of this danger. It was almost equally plain, she thought, that Herbert himself did not realise what would be the consequences to his career of a misalliance so obviously and grotesquely unsuitable.

Neither of these men, she was positively certain—neither the old man dreaming away his life in a wheel-chair nor the young man wasting his time in cowsheds and pigsties—had any suspicion at all of the plot which was being worked out at their expense under their very noses. Here in itself was surely sufficient justification for her dogma that it is extremely dangerous for anyone to live in the country.

She decided to postpone any further discussions about the junketings which she desired to arrange for Herbert's coming of age, and to blow through the great rooms and corridors of DurrIDGE Castle a *réveillé* which would thoroughly and startlingly awaken these two men from their dangerous sleep, a sleep in which their minds, as she afterwards told the duke, were snoring like a couple of peasants.

She began at the dinner-table, on the same day of the Townleys' visit, by talking of Herbert's future. She wore on this occasion the most challenging of her dresses, and rather

more diamonds and pearls than two great ladies of medium size would wear at an official reception in London. Her pale face was covered with a powder which gave it almost a mauve appearance, very unrestful to the eye.

She insisted that it was Herbert's duty to spend a certain part of the year in London, and told him that he ought to train himself for his future work in the House of Lords by becoming a member of the House of Commons. When he told her that he had no intention of ever taking any part in the political life of the country, except as a private citizen, she informed him that he had no choice in the matter—that his birth had already decided for him the nature of his duties and the character of his career.

After dinner, when they were seated in the library and there were no servants to protect Herbert from the full brutality of her logic, she carried the matter a step farther.

"I am sure, Herbert," she said, "that if you go on living this unnatural life much longer you will soon be caught by some designing provincial mother for her vulgar little daughter, and end your days as an ignominious nonentity. Why, I shouldn't be surprised," she added, beginning to laugh, "if even that diocesan sort of woman who was at luncheon to-day is not spreading a net to catch you for her priggish little blue-stocking of a daughter."

This remark, which Lady Theresa intended merely as an introduction to her attack, a preliminary note to the full blast of her *réveillé*, had an extraordinary effect on Herbert Stretton. He took his pipe from his mouth almost sharply, looked very fixedly, not to say fiercely, at his aunt, and begged her, in a tone of voice which was quite decisively annoyed, not to discuss his private affairs.

She was disconcerted, but protested with a haughty energy against such an injunction, appealing to the duke, and telling Herbert that he was only a boy, and that even if he were ten years older she still had the right, as his aunt, to discuss his career.

"You seem to forget, my dear Herbert," she said tartly, "that the career of a future head of a great house is a matter of concern to all its members."

"I do not wish to be rude," said Herbert, rising from his chair, "but, as I do not allow anyone except my grandfather to discuss my private affairs, I cannot stay in the room with you."

Nothing would induce him to stay. He was not merely

offended ; he was even trembling with anger. All the sweetness of his nature had suddenly evaporated. He no longer disliked his aunt ; he hated her. How hot he had become ! He could feel the blood in his eyes. How furious he was ! As he relighted his pipe his fingers were shaking.

His exit, however, only served to open the floodgates of Lady Theresa's eloquence. For a matter of two hours she held forth with extraordinary force, and with scarcely more than twenty brief interruptions from the duke, on the dreadful peril of living such a bucolic, selfish, and unnatural life as her nephew, in his ignorance of society, and in his contempt for his order, apparently had made up his mind to live.

Again and again did she refer to the Townleys, and with such persistent alarm and such clever criticism of both the mother and the daughter that when the poor old duke, thoroughly exhausted by the cataract of her volubility, went at last to his massage and his pillow, it was with an extremely anxious mind and a troublesome headache.

Lady Theresa was in the habit of not leaving her room till the world was sufficiently warmed up and civilised for her reception. The duke, therefore, who was always valeted out of bed at eight o'clock, after his morning's massage, and regularly took his breakfast at a quarter to nine, had an excellent opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* with Herbert before that young gentleman once more encountered his aunt.

The boy himself, as it happened, began the matter at breakfast, while the butler, who attended to the duke's eating and drinking, was still in the room.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "that I rather exploded last night."

"We'll talk about it later," said the duke, whose headache was still troubling him. "If you can spare me a little time after breakfast, there are one or two matters I should like to discuss with you. In the meantime, don't worry about the explosion. Make a good breakfast. Your aunt is perfectly used to such occurrences. They are, in fact, the consequence she naturally expects from her rather browbeating form of policy. She's something of a domestic Palmerston. I went to bed thoroughly tired out, let me tell you."

"I hope you slept well, sir?"

"Not very well ; only pretty well."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, one gets used to bad nights."

When breakfast was finished, Herbert wheeled the duke

into the library, where the letters and a local newspaper awaited him, and where a fire was burning under the Joshua Reynolds, although some of the windows were open.

"Light your pipe," said the duke; "it will help you not to explode at what I am going to say to you."

"You'd never make me explode, sir, whatever you might say to me," Herbert replied, sitting down a little away from the fire, and feeling for his pipe. "I hope you know that."

"Poor Theresa, though she was handsome enough as a girl—we used to call her a Juno in those days—was always a little vulgar," said the duke, very much pleased by Herbert's remark. "She seems to have been born a dogmatist, and dogmatism is the soul of vulgarity. Even as a girl, I remember, she seemed to like putting people's backs up. She was always fond of laying down the law. It's a bad habit. It's rather Radical and Dissenterish, though she doesn't seem to know it. However, we may learn even from stupid people, and I'm not sure that you and I may not learn something from your aunt."

Herbert lighted his pipe and sat stiffly in his chair, looking straight before him at the fire. It was not often that he looked people in the eyes. But this was not from any want of candour or frankness on his part; it arose entirely from a sort of loneliness of mind which made him extremely self-conscious with sophisticated people, and even a little awkward with the unsophisticated; perhaps it was a part of that resemblance to a dog which we have already noticed in him. A dog does not often look into anybody's eyes, even his master's.

The duke began by speaking of Herbert's future. Certain duties as well as certain rights appertained to one who occupied ducal rank. Herbert must not regard himself as a private country gentleman. He would have duties, not only to the county, but to the country. The question was, Could he prepare himself for those duties by living the secluded life he had now begun to live at DurrIDGE? Ought he not to go regularly to London, to meet people in politics, to keep himself in contact with the thought and tendencies, such as they were, of the present age? On the whole, the duke was of opinion that Herbert's aunt was right in this matter. DurrIDGE was not the best sort of place in which a young man of Herbert's position should spend his early manhood. It was a place for holidays, not for a career.

The DurrIDGE cricket club and the DurrIDGE football club,

in which Herbert, as captain, cut a conspicuous figure, were not, after all, the fields on which a man of his rank must make a career. He was cast for a greater part in the national life, and London would seem to be the stage on which he was intended to enact that part.

Asked, after a longish pause, to say what he thought of this matter, Herbert, fidgeting at his lower lip with the stem of his pipe, and still looking into the fire, replied that he had no talent for political life, and thoroughly disliked London. "As a matter of fact, sir, I'm a bit of a fool, as I've no doubt you've already discovered."

The duke rejoined that he was still young, and might discover that he possessed a talent for politics, if he went into society and rubbed his wits against the wits of other men.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir," said Herbert, "but I am perfectly certain that I have no talent for politics." After a pause he added, "On the other hand, if it isn't boastful to say so, I do feel that I've got a certain amount of talent for running an estate."

The duke smiled.

"After all, sir," Herbert continued, "there are plenty of men willing to run the country, aren't there?"

The duke considered for a moment, studying the boy's gypsy-like face, and then replied as follows: "One of the many things that I have seen die out and disappear in England is a love of glory. When I was a boy it was the perfectly natural aspiration of every young man of any status and talents. Nelson was not ashamed to let the whole world know that he wanted glory. Pitt wanted glory. So did the Duke of Wellington. So did that shabby fellow Byron. The whole nation, in fact, was straining to achieve glory. Dickens wanted fame, and Thackeray wanted social notice. Dizzy was a glutton for both. The manufacturers were also seeking their kind of glory—wealth and a recognised position in society. I'm not at all sure that the way in which society ordered its goings in those times was not the cause of this ambition. I didn't much like it myself; indeed, I was one of the men who set themselves to alter it; but in those days, Herbert, there's no doubt about it, people liked showing off. They didn't drive about in carriages, but in equipages. The harness of a pair of horses was a sight for the gods. Coachmen and footmen were tremendous fellows. Receptions in the great houses were splendid affairs. Ladies wore a regular

regalia. Men of rank appeared with their orders, and behaved themselves as if they were the lords of creation. It was like a perpetual Court drawing-room and Lord Mayor's Show rolled into one. There was no rat-catcher style in those days. Dandyism was almost a religion. Conversation was brilliant and sometimes profound. Perhaps it made for a certain dignity in life. I can remember that fellow Cardigan swaggering in half a dozen drawing-rooms, and telling the world all about Balaclava. No doubt about it, that kind of longing to cut a figure in the world helped the age to achieve great things. As soon as showing off became vulgar, mediocrity came in. As soon as society became tame it became vulgar. With the decline of a love of glory and a desire to shine the idea of duty slipped out of sight. People became modest, but selfish. The tendency now is to crush individuality. I'm not at all sure that the Radical tendencies of the present age won't result in the death of personality. But I daresay there'll be a reaction. However, you don't want to lead that reaction. You have no desire for glory, I understand?"

"None at all, sir."

"Well, then, let that go."

Herbert knitted his brows, and his face became dark and sullen. "Why can't my aunt leave us alone?" he asked very quietly. "If she hadn't come here this question would never have arisen. You and I, sir, get on particularly well together. I daresay I'm not a very cheerful companion for you. In fact, I know I'm not. You're a very clever man, an unusually clever man, and I am—well, I was a perfect fool at Eton, and even Aylmer Montgomery couldn't make anything of my two years at Oxford, so that shows the sort of fellow I am. All the same, sir, if you're good enough to put up with my society——"

He stopped, not knowing how to finish the sentence.

The duke said, "I am perfectly content with your society, Herbert. But I'm an old man. You have got your life before you. In the very nature of things it can't be long before I go."

Herbert said sternly, "I'd rather you didn't speak like that."

The duke laughed. "Why not? Old men, Herbert, are not afraid to die."

"Please, sir; I'd rather you didn't."

Again the duke laughed, amused by the boy's earnestness.

"You mustn't think I'm a sentimentalist. I'm only speaking

of my death, because it will make a very considerable difference to your position. It's a matter of business."

Herbert said, in a voice perfectly under control but charged with a depth of feeling extremely unusual in his utterances, "I'm very fond of you, sir, though you may not know it, and I would very much rather, if you don't mind, that you didn't speak of this matter any more."

It was the first time for many years that the duke had been moved. He looked across the room at the young man, who was still staring at the fire, and something warm stirred in his heart, while his eyes began to blink rather quickly.

"You must take care what you say, Herbert, about being fond of me, or you may make me whimper. Some old men get into that habit. It's a very bad one. Nothing is so degrading to an old fellow as to become a whimperer. In my case, too, there'd be the additional indignity of not being able to wipe away my own tears. You'd have to do that for me."

Herbert suddenly got up and walked to the fire, knocking out his pipe on the top bar of the steel grate. "Is there anything else, sir, that you wanted to say?" he asked, still bending under the mantelpiece and examining the bowl of his pipe.

"One thing more," replied the duke.

The boy straightened himself up, and, standing at the side of the mantelpiece, so that he did not get between the duke and the fire, looked down the long room, over the three famous writing-tables with their scarlet tops, to the golden Gainsborough portrait of the duke's grandmother.

"Your aunt said something last night," continued the duke, "about a possible idea in Mrs. Townley's head that you might marry Isabel."

"She did, sir," replied Herbert, with meaning.

"Will you allow me, as a very old friend, Herbert"—he smiled and spoke with obvious affection—"to ask if you think there is any truth in your aunt's suspicion?"

"Mrs. Townley, sir, was a particular friend of my mother."

"Yes. She was. I had forgotten that."

"My aunt had no right to speak of her as she did last night."

"Well, no; she hadn't."

"As for Isabel——" He came to a sudden stop, very strung up.

"Yes, Herbert?" inquired the duke, with a feeling that Theresa had certainly not spoken a moment too soon.

"She's not," said Herbert, recovering his composure, "a blue-stocking in the least. She's a perfectly natural girl. She's clever, but she's not a prig. Why, sir"—here he did look at his grandfather for quite thirty seconds—"as a matter of fact, she put all of us right yesterday afternoon in the matter of the new cottages. I should like to tell you about that, sir. And she didn't do it as if she was showing off. She did it simply because she was really interested, and because she wanted to help. I have got a very great respect for Isabel. She's the one girl I've ever met who takes an intelligent interest in serious things."

"Well, tell me, Herbert."

The young man proceeded to relate that he had shown Isabel the plans for the new cottages, plans drawn by the agent of the estate, and Isabel, after being pressed by Herbert for an opinion, who felt she was not pleased with the plans, had told him things he had never thought of before, and things that he felt to be entirely right directly she told him.

The cottages, she said, had the most serious fault of contemporary architecture; they were intentionally and busily pretty. There was an excess of decoration. They showed no evidence at all that form had been considered. Moreover, red bricks and red tiles were not the materials of the district. They should be built of stone and slab-tiles, like the old houses in that part of the world. On paper they looked romantic and sentimental; erected, they would be a dreadful blot on the landscape. He had said to her, "We all thought they were rather artistic"; and she had replied, "That's why I dislike them. They oughtn't to be artistic. They ought to be right."

The duke, who had not bothered his head about these labourers' cottages, agreed that this was valuable criticism, and expressed his respect for Isabel's taste and his gratitude for her advice; but he soon got to the matter which was of infinitely more moment to him than the cottages. He asked Herbert to tell him what were his feelings towards Isabel.

"I like her very much indeed, sir," said the boy, walking down the room for a few paces, and then turning about.

The duke kept his eyes on the fire to make it easier for Herbert.

"Is that all, old man?" he inquired very gently. No answer coming, he added presently, "Don't tell me if you would rather not."

Herbert said, "I don't think I'm a marrying man, sir."

The duke looked up quickly, and turned round to get a glimpse of him. "*That* would be serious indeed," he said almost sharply.

"But if I did marry——" Herbert began, and left it at that.

"I see," said the duke, and nodded his head. Then, after a pause, he added, "In any case, you are not in any hurry?"

"No, sir."

"And you haven't yet said anything to Isabel?"

"No, sir."

"Then in that case, old man, I should let it wait for a little. Let us think about it. Let us look round us a bit. After all, as you said just now, we two get on particularly well together. There's no hurry."

Herbert replied, "I am perfectly satisfied with things as they are. I don't want anything altered. If you would make that quite clear to my aunt, sir, I should be much obliged."

"Well, I'll do my best. Now, give me my letters, and you go off to your work. Thank you, Herbert," he added, taking the letters and the newspaper. "Yes, that was very sound advice Isabel gave you. She's a very clever, nice girl. Now let me see what these damn Radicals are doing about Uganda. If that rascal Harcourt can abandon it he will."

XIII-

THESE were sad days for Mrs. Townley and Roscoe. Lady Theresa had left Durrige, but Herbert paid no visits and wrote no letters to Cumberfield. There was something ominous in the air.

"You may depend upon it, Nanny," said Mrs. Townley, "that Lady Theresa, who is an atheist if ever I met one, will never forgive Miss Isabel for having criticised her wicked principles."

"But when her ladyship has been gone a little longer, dear ma'am," said Roscoe the comforter, "you may be sure that Master Herbert will come over again. Nothing that her ladyship might say about Miss Isabel could turn him against her, I'm sure of that."

"Well, I hope not," returned Mrs. Townley. "We shall soon be shooting our partridges, and I'll tell the master to ask him over. Then we may see how the land lies. But I

can't help feeling, Nanny, that that wicked woman has said something to the duke or to Mr. Herbert himself, which has made a difference."

"If she has, ma'am," cried Roscoe, whiter than ever with indignation, "we may be sure that God will bring her into judgment for it."

"She's the sort of woman," replied Mrs. Townley, as if speaking to herself, "who might drop down dead any day in the week."

If they were sad times for madam and maid, they were curiously difficult days for the pretty and cultivated Isabel, who had no one to whom she could speak about the matter. She had to pretend that she was unaware of Herbert's neglect, and to go on with her life as if Herbert had nothing to do with it. She read a good deal at this time, copied a number of poems and fine things into her commonplace book, and began to make a series of outdoor studies of clouds for a studio picture of autumn woods which she hoped to send to the Royal Academy in the following year. But, although her days were thus fully occupied, she had plenty of time for thought, and most of her thoughts, try as she might to prevent it, were of Herbert and of her feelings towards him.

She entertained no doubt on the main issue, namely, that she loved him; but she teased herself very often with the question of the quality of this love. It was not, she felt, a wild and romantic sort of love. It was not the sort of love that Byron would have honoured and Werther understood. It was a cool, critical, and controlled love; yet it was certainly a love which preyed upon her peace of mind, for she was unmistakably conscious of unrest. In one aspect it was a thoroughly young-ladylike love, as free from passion and pain as a garden lake is free from the storms and vehemence of ocean; but in another aspect it was not the merely sentimental and rather simpering love of colourless young ladies, for her heart was troubled and her mind was no longer wholly hers.

Then there was the question of Herbert's feelings towards her. What were those feelings? Like hers, she thought, they were free of all excess and violence. He, too, was not of a raving or romantic disposition. But did he care for her at all? Yes, she thought he did. But did he care for her as she undoubtedly cared for him? Did her image appear on the plans of the cottages as he bent over the row of desks in the office? Did he fall asleep thinking of her? Did he find

that, whatever he might be doing, there was always a queer, numb feeling at his heart? She wondered. She could not be sure. Perhaps she was too afraid to give a definite answer.

Occasionally his name came up at Cumberland. Someone at luncheon or at tea had either been shooting with him or had seen him riding off to cub-hunting. Anthony Holton reported one day that Lady Theresa had consulted him about theatricals for Herbert's coming of age. One person would speak with admiration of Herbert's devotion to his duties; another would dismiss him as a dull dog with not two ideas in his head. Isabel never listened to any such conversations as these without realising that Herbert lived an exceedingly busy life, in which there could be very little time, she imagined, for thinking of anything so romantic as love.

She made an effort on one of these occasions to put him out of her mind. Anthony Holton, after having spoken rather slightly of Herbert at luncheon, had asked to see her picture, and in the studio, praising it with knowledge and discretion, had returned again to Herbert Stretton.

"It is a sad thing," he said, "that art should play so small a part in English society. Take Durridge, for example. It ought to be a stronghold against the Goths and Vandals. It ought to be a centre radiating sweetness and light throughout the North of England. But what will young Stretton make of it? One has only to ask the question. He's a very nice boy, becomingly modest and anxious to do his duty as a landowner; but of culture he really hasn't the ghost of an idea. Durridge will become a sort of superior ale-house. Those wonderful books in the library will never be read. The splendid pictures will never be looked at. The work of Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, and Adam will attract no attention. The talk will be all of partridges and pointers. The gun-room will rule the drawing-room and the dining-room. Everyone, candle in hand, will go yawning to bed, night after night, with no new idea in their foolish heads and no fresh aspirations in their turnipy minds. I confess to you I despair of our class. It is not setting the right example. All the passion for culture in *fin-de-siècle* England is found among the middle and lower classes, and they tend to vulgarise it into movements."

Isabel thought over these words long after Holton had forgotten them. While he was busy in his beautiful library, studying prospectuses and writing letters to Mr. Whittaker Wright, she was struggling to make herself feel how dull a

thing it would be to live all her days in DurrIDGE Castle. After all, had she not idealised Herbert? Was he so good-looking as she thought he was? Was he so different from all the other men about her as she had rather too impulsively imagined? In any case, surely it would be absurd to allow indifference on the part of a young man regarded by many cultivated people as a dull dog to cloud her own radiant youth with disappointment.

There were moments in her days when she thoroughly convinced herself that nothing could be more unendurably dreadful than to live with an impassive young man who played cricket and football with his gardeners and grooms, who could become absorbed in bad architectural plans for labourers' cottages, who hated parties of every kind, and who never wanted to see London again.

But when mere logic had played this trick upon her feelings, something strong and admirable in Herbert's character presented itself to her contemplation, and once again the sensation of numbness returned to her heart, and she was unhappy in the thought that perhaps he did not care for her.

She avoided Roscoe in these days, retired often to the room assigned to her as a studio, and in the evening would sit with her father in his library, sometimes talking to him and sometimes listening to him as he read to her a passage from a leading article in *The Times*.

Mr. Townley never spoke to her of Herbert, but very often he would say to his wife, "I am afraid Isabel is worrying herself about that young man of yours."

XIV

PARTRIDGES were never shot at Cumberfield till the middle of September. Like most of his neighbouring landowners, Mr. Townley did not like to think about the shooting of cheepers. The high ground having been walked first and driven afterwards, the grouse were left to get over their troubles as best they might, while the guns turned their attention in mid-September to game on the low ground.

Mrs. Townley, well aware that Herbert Stretton disliked shooting-parties, suggested to her husband that he should send a note to DurrIDGE asking Herbert to come over with a brace of pointers and walk through the turnips to see how the Cumberfield partridges had turned out. The ironmaster

protested that he had never done such a thing before, and that Herbert would naturally feel that there was some hidden significance in the matter. He refused to do his wife's bidding.

"Then may I do it?" asked Mrs. Townley, who by this time was really disturbed by Herbert's indifference to Cumberfield.

"My dear," rejoined her husband, "have you not always done what you wanted? All the same, your idea, let me assure you, is a little far-fetched."

Mrs. Townley thought the matter over, for she had some respect at least for her husband's opinions; but in the end, so great was her impatience, she came to the conclusion that it would be perfectly natural to send Herbert the following note:

"DEAR HERBERT,—I ought to have driven over long ago to inquire after the duke, but I have been extremely busy, and so I hope he will forgive me and that you will understand. I shall come over as soon as possible, and I hope I shall find him well and happy, and as ready as ever to take me to task for my proselytising! In the meantime, I should be grateful if you would come over with a brace of pointers and see how our partridges have done. My husband doesn't shoot, as you know, and none of our sons can come to us till nearly the end of the month. The keepers seem to think that the young birds are plentiful, and quite strong on the wing.

"Yours sincerely,

"GEORGINA TOWNLEY.

"P.S.—Don't bother to write, but come over any day you like, and please take luncheon here whether any of us are in or not."

To this letter Herbert sent a reply next day which chilled Mrs. Townley's blood, and made her almost angry with him. He wrote:

"DEAR MRS. TOWNLEY,—I am afraid I cannot do what you ask, for we have a lot of partridges to shoot ourselves, and I am busy in a lot of other ways, and the castle is in possession of painters and paperers getting ready for November.

"Yours sincerely,

"HERBERT STRETTON."

Cold with annoyance, and troubled in her breathing by indignation, Mrs. Townley tore this dreadful letter in half, walked to the fire, and laid it carefully on the flames. She decided that no one, not even Roscoe, should ever know the details of this affront.

She recalled the look in Lady Theresa's eyes when Herbert and Isabel left them standing round the duke's chair before the fire in the hall and went off together to look at the cottage plans in the office. What had that wicked woman done? What had she said to make this sudden change in Herbert's disposition towards Isabel?

Unhappily, she felt she was never likely to discover what Lady Theresa had said or what she had done, for so great was the affront of Herbert's letter that now she could not even call at the castle to inquire after the duke. It seemed to her that relations were broken off, and that a state of war had begun. It was altogether the most terrible situation that she had ever been called upon to handle. Nay, it was the first actual check in a social life of unbroken triumph, and, what was worse than a check, it looked already like a defeat.

Her situation might be compared to that of an admiral who finds himself blockaded in his own harbour on the declaration of war.

Tragic as the position of this gallant lady was, she had at least the same opportunity for action which presents itself to the commander of a blockaded fleet; she could go ashore, as it were, and distract her attention from the sea horizon by excessive attention to internal problems. This course Mrs. Townley pursued with such courage and such energy that nobody guessed the true condition of her heart, and many charities, in consequence, found themselves richer than some of them had any right to expect.

Mrs. Townley's carriage, during these trying times, drove out every morning with one pair of horses, and every afternoon with another, and sometimes she was even away from Cumberland for a whole day. She carried bundles of leaflets in her hands, and books with loose papers showing between the leaves, and as the carriage swung through the autumn air she might be seen, wrapped in furs, studying these documents, and sometimes even attempting to jot down a note with a silver pencil. Matrons of hospitals discovered that she knew all about their affairs, and the local secretaries of such charities as the Girls' Friendly Society, the Ragged School Union, and

the Waifs and Strays found themselves driven into a far greater expenditure of time and energy than they had ever contemplated when Mrs. Townley first coaxed and wheedled them into their honorary responsibilities. In a word, Mrs. Townley was more than living up to her reputation as a woman who got things done.

Nor did the indefatigable lady of Cumberfield neglect her domestic and social duties in the midst of this philanthropic activity. Her house was as admirably and smoothly run as ever; the bailiff and the dairymaids were always conscious of her inspecting eyes upon them; and the head gardener was well aware of what she expected from his hot-houses. Every day, too, she continued to call upon some of her neighbours, even if it were only to inquire after the health of this old gentleman or this old lady; and once a week there was a dinner-party at Cumberfield, and soon plans were in being for a ball, with a military band from Durham.

To none of her entertainments did she invite Herbert Stretton, and when her husband spoke of this omission she replied, with a show of cheerfulness which almost deceived him, that Herbert hated parties, and would perfectly understand why she did not ask him.

Thus did the blockaded châtelaine of Cumberfield, unable to give battle by sea, keep up her spirits, and deceive, as she hoped, the enemy, by an activity which everyone praised and a good many set down to her determination to get Isabel well married.

Pheasants were being shot, and the days were drawing in, with an unpleasant sense of winter, before any intimation came from the calm isolation of Durrige Castle that its inmates were aware of the existence of bustling Cumberfield. This intimation took the shape of a formal invitation for dinner and a dance from the Duke of Rothbury and Lady Theresa Grantham. It was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Townley. The handwriting on the card suggested that it had been dashed off with no little irritation, if not with an actual wish to indicate that the invitation was regarded as a duty. And the handwriting was plainly feminine.

For two days Mrs. Townley considered whether she should accept this invitation or refuse it. Her husband was for acceptance, and so was Roscoe, and so also, but less certainly was Isabel. In the end, having well weighed the pros and cons, Mrs. Townley sent a formal acceptance, and, giving out to her neighbours that she was going to spend a few days at

Lambeth Palace, took Isabel up to London, and there bought her such a gown, such a string of pearls, such a cloak, such gloves, such stockings, and such shoes, as only the most exigent debutante could desire.

Those days in London, spent chiefly in the shops, were so delightful to Mrs. Townley, such a change from her normal life in the North, that she almost forgot her hatred of Lady Theresa and her anxiety about Herbert and Isabel.

What were her feelings, however, on reading one morning, after the beautiful prayers in the chapel of Lambeth Palace, the following letter from her husband:

"MY DEAR GEORGINA,—I quite understand you have only time to send me short letters. Don't worry on that score. Glad you are well and that the dear child is enjoying herself. My love to her.

"Herbert Stretton rode over this afternoon, and seemed very put about, so they tell me, when he discovered that Isabel was away. He asked for her. I had not got back from work or I might have discovered the object of his call. Pity he had the long ride for nothing.

"Everything is going on well enough, and the game larder is nearly as full as it will hold; but the house misses you—nothing is quite the same—and I shall be glad when you return, both of you.

"Your affectionate husband,

"CHRISTOPHER TOWNLEY."

XV

BECAUSE of the duke's state of health, the people invited to stay in the castle for the celebration of Herbert's coming of age were almost entirely limited to members of his family. Lady Theresa contrived, however, to ask three very pretty, animated, and clever girls, and two young men famous in the London of those days for their new style of dandyism and their irreverent attitude towards all forms of authority. These five people composed the cast of a play which was to be given during the celebrations.

But most of the guests were old and sad, picturesque specimens of an exclusive breed which had been overborne and rather ruffled, if not actually damaged, by a wave of democratic enthusiasm; people who were spectators of life

rather than actors, decorative rather than useful, charming rather than inspiring.

There were several faded ladies among them, tall and lean, very thoroughbred in appearance, who wore their last vestiges of beauty with a mournful air, and carried in the fineness of their pale faces memories of a romantic and celebrated past. One of these ladies, the Countess of Stoborough, who always went about the castle in a shawl or in furs, and who had rather a bluish nose and very small, watery, grey eyes, had lately emerged from a drawing-room revival of religion, and spoke wistfully of Adeline Bedford, Annie Trotter, and Mary Kinnauld to anyone round the fire who would listen to her. Most of the men, some of whom had held office in Lord Salisbury's administration, were also a trifle funereal in manner, even those who had sown industriously to the flesh behaving with a grave and solemn courtesy to these faded ladies, as if something beautiful in their lives had recently given up the ghost and left them pathetically alone in a world which knew nothing about their importance.

Among these handsome old men was a veteran of the world who had never married, and who had spent his life in circulating among the great houses of England, Scotland, and Ireland, carrying the gossip of one to another, receiving the confidences of ladies in distress and of gentlemen in difficulties, giving excellent advice, uttering excellent opinions, and, without ever sacrificing either his comfort or his means for a single person, earning the reputation of a thoroughly sympathetic soul, ready to do anything for anybody.

Twenty years younger than the duke, and with his dark hair only changed to iron grey, this tall, corpulent, and dignified old gentleman of seventy-two years of age, Robert Finch by name, entirely lacked the brightness of the duke's birdlike eye, and possessed nothing at all of the duke's sprightliness of manner; he might have been years older. One of Lady Theresa's irreverent wits had hit him off at once as "the chief mourner of the celebrations." He moved among the other guests with a noiseless step and a brooding eye, no smile on his face and no cheerfulness in his voice, ever seeking someone to whom he could speak of the days that were fled—beautiful days of culture and romance, before commercialism and Darwinism had vulgarised the face of existence.

His talk was all about people. Harriet Sutherland was a name often on his lips, and uttered always with a sigh. He was present at the wedding of her son Stafford to Miss Hay

Mackenzie, which was solemnised in the drawing-room of Cliveden, and at which dear old Harrowby wore his Garter blue ribbon and star. He had stories to tell of Constance Westminster and her parrot, of dear Lilah Ormonde, of the lovely Georgina Dudley, of Louisa Cavendish, who married Sailor Egerton, of Flora Hastings, who married Norfolk, and many reminiscences of Eva Baird, the Holfords of Dorchester House, Mrs. Greville and her sister Lady Probyn, the Duchesse de Mouchy, the Sackville-Wests, the Lichfields, the Greys, the Carlisle Howards, and tales of Augustus Lumley, Spencer Cowper, Eustace Balfour, and FitzHardinge, surnamed the Giant.

"My dear George," he would say to the duke, "you are a happy man, I assure you, to live so completely out of the world. There is nothing to contemplate for those of us who still go about a little, save the ruins of our old affections."

The duke would reply that Peel and Grey, and afterwards that rascal Forster, with his Education Act, were responsible for this mournful state of things; but Robert Finch would shake his old sceptical head very sorrowfully, examine the ash of his cigar, and assure the duke that the real culprit was Darwin, who had destroyed religion and degraded the human race to the level of monkeys.

"Whoever started it," was the duke's answer, "this scoundrel Gladstone will complete the ruin. We shall both live, Bob, to see the United Kingdom broken up, the Empire dissolved, and a hobnailed mob dancing on the corpse of England."

Often the two old men would speak of Herbert's future, and Robert Finch on these occasions proved himself a firm ally of the duke's heir. He said that politics had now become extremely difficult for gentlemen, and would soon, he thought, become impossible. Unless one had the natural vulgarity of a Churchill, he said, one might as well stand aside altogether from the political jungle. It was a place for a *bravo*, not for a gentleman. Randolph, by the way, had come back from South Africa a different man; he had grown a beard and lost his hair; something, he understood, was wrong with his nerves; even his voice seemed to be affected. Lord Salisbury's hold on the party, he heard, was loosening. Arthur Balfour apparently might manage to keep his place, because he was a cynic who regarded the whole thing as an amusing game, and because his rather insolent attitude of aristocratic detachment impressed the Radicals, and gave him a certain prestige in

the House of Commons. Joe Chamberlain, however, was pretty certain to join the party, and, of course, a fellow of that order would soon sweep Arthur aside.

No ; Herbert could not hope to live in such an atmosphere. The best thing he could do was to stay in the country, rule over his dominions till the Radicals took them away from him, and then go over to America and marry a Vanderbilt. "The world you and I have known, my dear George, is dead and gone. I was saying to Harriet Wantage only the other day——"

This opinion of Mr. Robert Finch was not supported by a younger and far more interesting person at the castle, Aylmer Montgomery, who had been Herbert's fagmaster at Eton and his tutor at Christ Church. He sat a good deal with the duke, and was able, without offending him in the least, to suggest a more hopeful view of England's future. He was a disciple of Matthew Arnold, and was regarded at Oxford as a coming man.

As for Herbert's future, Mr. Montgomery thought that he should prepare himself for his duties as a member of the House of Lords by reading history and taking a gradually increasing part in county work. He was not quick, but he was no dullard. He had many admirable qualities, qualities which were essentially English, and qualities which took time to develop.

"I do not think he has the makings of a Chatham," said Montgomery, "but I do think he has the makings of a Hartington."

The duke smiled. "A dull dog, Mr. Montgomery ; a very dull dog ; but I see what you mean."

"My view is," replied Montgomery, "that if Herbert marries a clever woman he may live to exercise a moderating influence on the politics of the country."

"Ah," said the duke ; "you think he is one of that sort of men, do you ?" He was silent for an appreciable time ; then he added, "Well, you'll meet a Miss Townley to-morrow night. Have a talk with her, and tell me what you think of her mind. I shall be obliged to you. You'll understand, of course, that this is a matter of some confidence."

"Herbert has already spoken to me about her."

"Oh, he has ! Well, what did he say ?"

"He told me he would like to get her opinion about the speech I have composed for him—the speech he is to make at the tenants' dinner. I think he has read it to you."

"Yes, and a very good speech it is, too. So he wants her to approve of it, does he ? Hum ! Hum ! That's rather a

straw, isn't it? Well, she's a clever girl. Her head is screwed on in the right way; but"—he began to chuckle—"you had better avoid her mother. She's a dreadful proselytiser."

XVI

WITH a feeling that she was at last going into battle, that at last the wearing weeks of the blockade were definitely over, Mrs. Townley, with Isabel beside her, and Mr. Townley on the opposite seat of the closed landau, set out for the great dinner-party at Durrige Castle.

She was unusually silent during the first part of the long drive, and as Mr. Townley was habitually silent, and as Isabel was too busy with particularly private thoughts to desire conversation, the sound of the horses' hoofs striking the clammy road, and the sound of the rubber-tyred wheels purring through the wintry slush, came to the three rugged-up and well-cloaked travellers in the dark carriage with the pleasant and unbroken sense of adventure.

Every now and then one of the horses would shy, or pretend to shy, at something in the hedge, and on these occasions the remonstrating *cluck-cluck* of the old coachman would enter through the half-opened window, as if to announce that the adventure was not so free from perils as the travellers might suppose.

"Are you sure that your feet are warm?" Mrs. Townley inquired of Isabel, after a long silence.

"Quite sure; I've got them in a muff."

Mr. Townley said, "That reminds me of a story."

"It seems to me to be getting colder and colder," said his wife, drawing her cloak closer about her upright body.

"Would you like the window up?" he asked, but without moving.

"Oh, no; we shouldn't be able to breathe."

"What was your story, father?" Isabel inquired.

"Oh, the story! Well, there was a middle-class mother in Dublin who took her daughter to a viceregal ball. They arrived early, and were sitting excitedly in the ballroom side by side, when one of their middle-class friends came up with a programme and a pencil in his hand. He addressed the girl with the usual request, 'May I have the pleasure——' But the mother of the girl interfered, and cut him short. 'No, you may not, Mr. O'Brien,' she snapped, 'for she's keeping herself cool for the Earl of Ranfurly.'"

Isabel laughed, but her mother exclaimed rather scornfully and yet indifferently, "I don't see what that story has to do with my asking Isabel if her feet were warm."

"But it's a lovely story," said Isabel. "How well you imitate the Irish accent." She repeated the funny sounding name, "*The Earl of Ranfurly*."

They relapsed into silence again.

Presently they were conscious of an unpleasant straining at their throats and of a slightly painful smarting at their eyes. "Put up the window," commanded Mrs. Townley, raising her handkerchief to her mouth.

While her husband was obeying this order the pace of the horses sensibly slackened, and before he had fastened the strap that pace had become a walk. They had driven into a thick belt of fog.

Mrs. Townley was vexed. She began to speak with her official briskness. What a nuisance it would be if they arrived late! What a tragedy if they did not arrive at all!

"I know a worse tragedy even than that," said Mr. Townley, as the carriage came to a stop; "we might be able neither to get there nor to get back."

The footman had descended from the box and was lifting out one of the lamps. Isabel saw him go gingerly forward, walking on his toes through the mud, and then disappear into the fog ahead. The carriage began to move after him at a walk. The voice of the coachman, and also his cough, came to them from the outer world above them, and then the younger voice of the groom from the darkness ahead.

Mrs. Townley began to speculate on how far they had got, and what the village would be through which they would pass next. She was impatient and alarmed. Mr. Townley was ordered to strike a match and look at his watch. Isabel was ordered to keep herself well wrapped up and not to open her mouth. "I want to lower the window and talk to Chambers," she complained, "but I dare not let any more fog into the carriage."

"This unfortunate mishap," said Mr. Townley, who was longing to smoke a cigar, "is a most painful opportunity for exercising philosophical resignation. I am hungry; I am cold; I want to smoke; and I expect we shall be here all night."

Isabel inquired of her mother whether her father might not smoke, and received the prompt, decisive, and final answer, "Certainly not!"

Ten minutes were lost by this inconsiderate fog. Directly they were clear of the worst of it, and the lamp was restored to its socket, and the footman, with very muddy boots, was back on the box, Mrs. Townley herself lowered the window, leaned out, and told Chambers that he must do his best to make up for lost time.

No sound of whip came to them, for Chambers had only to touch one of his horses on the flank to let the pair of them know what was in his mind. Sharply they trotted forward, and freely swung the carriage on its springs; delightful was the sensation of the imprisoned travellers as the powerful horses mounted to higher ground, clear of the fog, with leafless trees traced darkly against a pale sky, and milk-white stars burning above the spectral branches.

At a turn in the road they saw another carriage ahead of them, and presently they became aware, from Mr. Townley's observation, of yet another carriage behind them.

"I expect it's the Thorntons," said Mrs. Townley, sitting more forward and looking through the window at the stars.

Isabel could now see several carriages in front of them, but she said nothing about the matter, so busy was she speculating on the meeting with Herbert; occasionally thinking, too, of her frock, her pearls, and her hair.

But at the entrance to DurrIDGE Castle she became less subjective and much more alert with excitement. The great gateway was decorated with flags and illuminated with coloured lamps. A crowd of villagers stood on either side of the arch, peering into the long line of carriages as the horses slowed down on ascending the paved slope to the entry. Boys were running to and fro brandishing torches and shouting challenges for a fight. An old soldier stood at his cottage gate blowing a cornet for all he was worth. A group of miners, with mugs of beer in their hands, stood before the ale-house watching the carriages.

Once through the gateway the scene became almost theatrical in its gaiety. Venetian masts swathed with scarlet and white were erected on either side of the carriage road, with coloured lamps hanging from them in a sweeping curve and stretching far away into the distance. There were lamps in the trees, more lamps still in the garden, while the courtyard of the castle, every window of which appeared to be *en fête*, was ablaze with lamps of all sorts and sizes. In the distance, on a bastion above the river, a gigantic bonfire was sending up tongues of scarlet flame into the night, with people

shouting and dancing round it, some of whom were waving torches over their heads.

"Dear me," said Mr. Townley, "it's a regular slap-up affair, isn't it?"

"Slap-up affair!" exclaimed Mrs. Townley. "Isn't that a rather vulgar expression?"

"Well, the only other term I know," said her husband, "is *chic*, and that doesn't seem grand enough for the occasion."

Mrs. Townley laughed. "My dear Christopher," she said, "you are sometimes very droll."

Through the open doors of the castle Isabel caught sight of many flowers, groups of servants, and crowds of guests; the sound of brass music reached her ears above the chatter of people getting out of their carriages and ascending the flight of carpeted steps to the warmth and cheerfulness of those open doors. She became aware of a new feeling. She was no longer excited. She certainly was not nervous. She was sad, almost sick with sadness, feeling that she was at some dreadful physical distance from the man who seemed to live so intimately in her thoughts.

Like her father, she wanted to be home, and perhaps, if the truth were told, this desire for the peace and security of Cumberfield was not altogether far from the warrior heart of Mrs. Townley. She, too, as she ascended the carpeted stairs to the open doors, used as she was to state occasions, familiar as she was with prominence on all occasions, however splendid, had the sensation of a new distance between herself and the inhabitants of this crowded castle.

There were many of their friends in the hall, which seemed to make things a little easier. They talked to these people, who were mostly rather nervous, with an appearance of cheerfulness, as they put off their wraps and went forward in a long line of guests to the corridor which led to the state apartments. Mrs. Townley observed among these local guests certain people whom she had never considered of the county, and it made her feel uncomfortably sure that Lady Theresa Grantham regarded her as a person of that sort, infinitely below her intimate notice. The sense of impending battle served, however, to rally her spirits, and when her name was announced she went serenely forward, a tall, dignified, and friendly figure, entering the great drawing-room with all the natural ease and simple unaffected pleasure of a good sensible woman.

Lady Theresa, who was standing under an immense

chandelier as full and glittering as herself, the candles of which were not much whiter than her powdered skin, had just greeted some rather commonplace people with marked pleasure and a condescension which appeared to thrill them, so full of interest was it, as if she had known them a long time ; but, as she perfunctorily put out her hand to Mrs. Townley some moment or two before the Cumberfield lady was within shaking reach, she turned—hurriedly for her—to an oversmart young man at her side, and said something which made him raise his eyebrows, spread his hands very affectedly, and exclaim, "Oh, no ; surely not !" Then, as Mrs. Townley's fingers touched her hand, the old woman, who was wearing diamonds in all directions, flashed a cold look at her, bestowed on her a curt nod of the head, and straightway began to fan herself as if she were bored to extinction.

She treated Isabel in much the same fashion, and regarded Mr. Townley as if she were very doubtful indeed whether such a person could possibly have been invited ; but in another moment she was all smiles and pleasantries, shaking hands quite warmly and even affectionately with someone she had never seen before, and was sincerely desirous of never seeing again.

Herbert, who stood at her side, was so utterly wretched at the whole business of this festivity that he did not notice his aunt's treatment of the Cumberfield party, and greeted them one by one with a blank face, smouldering eyes, and sullen lips, apparently with no greater warmth than she herself had done.

Mrs. Townley, having endured this reception with wonderful dignity, passed on into the crowded room with the same smile on her face, but not with the same pleasure in her heart. *This*, she vowed, should be the last time she ever entered Durridge Castle. No hope of reaching her last ambition should ever persuade her to endure such monstrous treatment again. Isabel, even more shaken than her mother by the marked coldness of their reception, drew nearer to her father's side, taking his arm, hanging her head a little, striving to escape notice, and hoping he would soon say something to her as they moved through the crush of staring people.

In a freer space of the great apartment Mrs. Townley came to a stand and looked about her. It was not long before she arrived at the conclusion that this was one of those hateful occasions when a houseful of fashionable people from London keep strictly to themselves, and amuse their selfish and

conceited minds by staring at guests invited from the locality as if they were an inferior breed of creatures.

Something of the same notion occurred to Isabel on catching sight of the three beautiful girls whom Lady Theresa had asked to the castle. They were standing behind Lady Theresa, and looked extremely languorous and bored, and yet every now and then they spoke together, and on these occasions their eyes would flash, they would smile derisively, even laugh rather brutally, and turn to look at one of the new arrivals. Isabel acknowledged that these girls were most beautiful and brilliant-looking, but felt that they were scornful, arrogant, and hard.

The older ladies of the house-party were sitting down in the neighbourhood of a log fire, with their faded faces and pinched chins turned over their sloping shoulders to watch with weary eyes the assembling guests. Here was Mr. Robert Finch, standing lugubriously behind one of the chairs, his hands resting on its back, as if he were about to read the funeral service over all the beautiful memories to which he and the circle of these faded ladies, most of whom were wearing coronets or tiaras, were absorbingly devoted. Here, too, was young Mr. Aylmer Montgomery, tall and elegant, regarding the crowded room with an intellectual detachment from behind well-polished eyeglasses, his long, dark hair carefully brushed, his large white tie negligently arranged at the base of a somewhat poetic collar, a black silk fob with dangling gold seals suspended from a pocket of his white waistcoat. And here, too, surrounded by people pressing forward to touch his twisted hand, was the Duke of Rothbury in his wheel-chair, wearing his ribbon and star of the Garter, with his valet standing at a little distance behind the chair, and the family doctor out of sight in the background.

Congregated together at some few paces from the circle of ladies were a number of good-looking and distinguished men, wearing orders and looking extremely bored, and even a little hungry, as they watched the assembling of the local guests.

"I hear," said one of them to his neighbour, "that the duke made up Herbert's income this morning to twenty thousand."

"The boy has disappointed him," rejoined the other; "and yet old George seems extremely fond of him."

"Theresa's afraid he'll marry into the middle classes and become a bumpkin."

"But there's no need, surely, for a martyrdom of that kind with twenty thousand a year for pocket money."

Mrs. Townley recognised among these exclusive guests many men who were famous in the great world from which she felt she had been publicly and insolently repulsed. There were Cabinet Ministers easily to be recognised from their pictures in the *Graphic*, the *Illustrated London News*, and *Punch*. There was a popular Master of Fox-hounds, red-whiskered, pink of face, and enormous, his glass screwed under a bushy eyebrow, his cheerful smile revealing excellent teeth. There was a judge famous from one end of England to the other, and as hard and remorseless-looking as he was famous. But the sight of these distinguished people did not add to the pain of Mrs. Townley's discomfiture half so much as the spectacle which suddenly confronted her gaze—the spectacle of her own Northern archbishop and two neighbouring bishops, all in plum-coloured Court dress, standing at so short a distance from Lady Theresa that they must surely have witnessed the extreme rudeness of that old harridan's reception. The aloofness of these dignitaries made her wound smart. Why did they not come to her? Why was she left standing there, outside the charmed circle of the great? It seemed to her that the lord-lieutenant caught sight of her and hastily averted his gaze.

"I never see a chandelier," said Mr. Finch, leaning over the chair on which his hands were resting to speak to its occupant, who raised sad eyes to his face for a moment, and then glanced away at the last arrivals, "without thinking of the fire at Inverary in 1877. My cousin Mary Campbell was there. They were all asleep in their beds. Lorne behaved splendidly. She told me he was a real hero. The thing that struck her most was the crash of a chandelier. Very curious. She described it marvellously. They were all in the hall when she caught sight of it, swaying. It swayed for a moment or two, and then there was a perfect avalanche of fire as it crashed to the floor with the falling in of the roof. The whole place was at once filled with burning glass, molten lead, and sheets of flame. A dreadful experience! And outside, where they had to go willy-nilly, the ground was covered with snow. Imagine it!"

"But it was an intolerably ugly place, was it not?" asked a thin lady.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was. Yes, very ugly. Many of the Scottish houses are ugly. But a portrait by Jameson of the Marquess of Argyll perished in the flames, which was a really dreadful calamity."

"But don't you think the Scotch overrate his work? I have never felt that it's *grande chose*."

"Well, they call him the Scotch Velazquez."

"Oh, I know. But I daresay they call Oban the Scotch Cannes, and Loch Lomond the Scotch Como. The Scotch are not a modest people. Who is that pretty girl over there with the tall woman in black and silver? She looks clever and distinguished."

"I haven't a notion. Would you like me to inquire?"

"Oh, no; it's a trifle. But she is pretty, is she not? Some of these girls are very wishy-washy, don't you think? Bad skins, and no carriage."

Isabel became aware of an extremely handsome man, some thirty years of age, staring at her from a few paces away. She did not know who he was, and was so interested in his good looks that she frankly answered his stare, till sudden confusion overcame her and she lowered her eyes. The unknown man, smiling with amusement, walked over to Mr. Townley and began to speak to him. His voice was distinguished, and was pleasantly humorous. He made jokes. He brought Isabel into the conversation. He created in two minutes a feeling of cheerfulness which seemed to bring Mr. Townley and Isabel into the very heart of the party. At one moment he was speaking of the art treasures in the castle, at the next of hunting, at the next of literature, at the next of politics—all so lightly and yet sincerely, all so cheerfully and yet as if he knew what he was talking about, that Mr. Townley was quite cheered, and Isabel began to wonder whether she had ever met so agreeable a person. His good looks were now of a secondary importance in her mind; what interested her was the sense of extraordinary vitality in this unknown man, who was like an actor and yet was evidently a gentleman, who reminded her at one moment of the Duke of Wellington in his youth and at the next of some jockey whose photograph she had seen—Fred Archer, perhaps, or Fred Webb—and who was obviously as sincerely and profoundly interested in art and politics as he was in hunting and racing.

While she was in this interested mood the valet behind the duke's chair went to Mr. Montgomery and said, "His Grace would like to speak to you, sir."

The duke told Montgomery that the girl standing on the other side of the fireplace with her mother and father, and with Lord Hawthorpe talking to her, was Miss Townley, and

asked him to go over to them and say he would be glad if they would come to him.

"She looks very well to-night," he concluded.

As the Townleys, shepherded by Montgomery, made their way to the duke's chair, the thin lady peered at the fresh young face of Isabel through her long glasses, and said to Finch, "Evidently provincials; but she is pretty in an indecisive manner, don't you think?"

Lord Hawthorpe of Glantingham watched Isabel go towards the duke with a new interest in his dark eyes. "Oh, so that's the girl, is it!" he reflected, and smiled at the pleasant thought that he had picked a winner.

XVII

LADY THERESA had consulted one of her witty young men about the troublesome matter of placing the duke's guests, and this witty young man had replied that nothing was easier. "All you have to do," he said, in his little, high-pitched, feminine voice, "is to look at the addresses, and then arrange that the gentlemen who live north should take in the ladies who live south, and the ladies who live west should be taken in by the gentlemen who live east. Thus you will ensure a regular mix-up, which is the secret of success."

This plan was followed to a certain extent, but Lady Theresa arranged that Mrs. Townley should be taken in by one of the obscurest of the local gentry, that Isabel should be taken in by one of the wittiest of her London young men, who was instructed to tease her, and that Mr. Townley should take in the wife of the Durridge curate.

The banquetting-hall enabled Lady Theresa to carry her campaign a step further. The high table, on a broad dais under a magnificent painted window of fourteenth century glass, was occupied by all the most distinguished people in the party, including the lord-lieutenants and the high sheriffs of three counties. The two long tables, at right angles to this dais, ran to the end of the hall, and it was at the far end of one of these tables, almost under the minstrels' gallery and unpleasantly close to the buttery, that she placed the great lady of Cumberland. At the other of these tables, and only a little higher up in the hall, Mr. Townley sat next to the curate's wife, and at the same table, quite out of sight from

the grand people, Isabel endured the bantering and irreverent wit of a London decadent who knew Frank Miles and Oscar Wilde, and could always manage to flash out the *mots* of Whistler so that they appeared as the coruscations of his own genius.

The brilliance of the great panelled hall, with its rich carved ceiling, its innumerable candles shining on lovely flowers, fine silver, old glass, and gold plate, was entirely lost upon Mrs. Townley, who had no sooner sat down in her humble place than she decided to send for her carriage directly the dinner was over. It made her indignant to see the archbishop and the two bishops at the high table. She ate scarcely anything, peremptorily refused the wines, stared coldly at the people opposite to her, and replied with an unmistakable snappishness to all attempts at conversation on the part of the obscure person who had taken her in, and who was so industriously drinking champagne that she felt convinced his intention was to affront her temperance principles.

When the dinner, which was not a good one, and suffered from long waits between the courses, was over, and when the port had made its first round of the hall, a cry of "Hush!" ran down the tables, and, in a sudden silence which fell on the company, the voice of the duke was faintly heard giving the toast of Her Majesty the Queen. The guests stood up, the musicians in the gallery over Mrs. Townley's head played a verse of the national anthem, and then the servants went down the tables with cigars and cigarettes. Mrs. Townley's gentleman, whose face was now a disgusting red, further outraged her feelings at this point by expressing a wish for a second visit from the port. There was another cry of "Hush!" and the lord-lieutenant of the county was seen standing up at the high table, grasping the lapels of his coat, and preparing his mind to propose the health of Herbert Stretton. A bad speech on a difficult subject dragged its dreary way to an end, and Mrs. Townley's red-faced neighbour, whose shirt-front was showing signs of indiscipline, beckoned up a footman, and, taking his cigar from his mouth, whispered into his ear that he would very much like another cognac.

Herbert's reply to the speech of the lord-lieutenant was brevity itself, and delivered in the staccato fashion of the barrack square. He thanked the company for their good wishes, announced his intention to attempt to follow in the steps of his great-grandfather, "to whom I owe everything,"

and sat down with such unexpected abruptness that it was a moment or two before anybody said "Hear, hear." This speech, which affected only the duke and Isabel, was interrupted by the sound of a loud explosion, which startled a good many people, and when it was over the word "*Fireworks*" passed down the tables, and shortly afterwards the company rose and filed out of the hall.

Isabel had no sooner reached the corridor than she was approached by Aylmer Montgomery, who was evidently posted there to await her coming. He seemed greatly relieved by her appearance.

"I know a window," he said, "from which you will be able to get a very good view of the fireworks. May I take you there?"

They went by a small staircase to the first floor of the castle, and here, in a corridor lined by statues and hung with fine pictures, Montgomery guided Isabel to a window which overlooked a wide stretch of the park. Some of the guests had put on their things and were standing outside on the terrace, the men smoking cigars, the ladies walking up and down for warmth. Beyond the garden there was a group of people going hurriedly to and fro with spurting tubes of fire in their hands, and every now and then a rocket shot up into the sky, or a fountain of golden sparks burst up from the darkness.

At one moment the great park, with its still trees, its upland of bracken, and its huddled cattle by the river, was illumined in every detail by a scarlet glare, which reminded Isabel of the Brocken Scene in *Faust*, and at the next moment by a green glare, which made everything look weird and tragic. All the time rockets were going up into the sky with a scream of protest, dropping balls of coloured fire from an immense height, which drifted away together like a falling kite, and went out one by one, with a rather pathetic resignation to the nepenthe of extinction. A succession of big bangs from maroons and of little bangs from crackers and squibs enlivened the display, while a set piece, supposed to represent Herbert and the Stretton lion, aroused first laughter, then amused speculation as to what the dickens it could mean, and finally a few feeble cheers. But, on the whole, the fireworks display was said to exceed anything ever seen in that part of the world.

Other people discovered the convenient window at which Montgomery and Isabel were standing, and soon the corridor

was crowded with guests anxious to get a good view of the fireworks, and perhaps to see something of the castle's interior.

"If you have had enough of gunpowder," Montgomery breathed into Isabel's ear, "I should like to speak to you before you go to the ballroom."

She expressed her readiness to follow his suggestion by turning away from the window.

"I have a request to make of you from Herbert Stretton," he said; "and, as it happens, the most convenient place for me to make that request is a room from which you can see something very much finer—at least, I hope you'll think so—than the fireworks."

He guided her into a small passage leading from the corridor, and, turning to the left, came presently to a door in one of the turrets. "This is Herbert's study," he said, opening for her to go in before him; "the most enviable room in the castle."

It smelt strongly of tobacco, and looked, at first sight, in the glow of a slumbering fire, and with no other light in the chamber, like an undergraduate's room in an old college. It was merely pleasant and comfortable, but with a touch of beauty and a sense of great dignity from the spirit of its ancient architecture.

"Before I light the candles," said Montgomery, "do just look out of this window. You are not afraid of the cold, are you?"

"Oh, no; and it seems quite warm in here."

"But I want to open the window."

"Please do; I am not afraid."

She was aware of an increasing noise from outside as she approached the casement at whose latch Montgomery was already fumbling, and when he had opened it, and the cold night burst in at her, she realised that this roaring sound came from the Force discharging itself into the dene.

The sight that met her eyes at the open window of this turret was something more than beautiful. The river was in spate, and ran in a great mass of amber and white foam to the shining black and silver curved edge of the Force. A smoke of spray rose into the air beyond the cataract and blew backwards towards the falling waters. Out of the seething and roaring turmoil beyond the Force, as far as eye could see, great black rocks, at one moment swept out of sight by racing foam and at the next rising up with triumph and discharging over their sides a hurried flash of drenching water, caught

the light of a golden moon in a misty sky, and burned with celestial splendour in the midst of the flood. On either side of the dene, looming darkly through the haze, were pine-trees, majestic in their height and beautiful in their form; and behind the pine-trees on the northern bank were rock-strewn hills, rising up blackly from the mist to the stars, with a clean, silvery rim at their summits against the gentler sky.

With the light of the moon in her eyes, the plunging sound of the waters in her ears, and the cold pressure of the night-wind at her brow, Isabel quoted a famous line of Matthew Arnold. Mr. Montgomery turned to look at her. "Curiously," he said, studying her face with interest, "though I often have those lovely words in my mind, so Greek in their simplicity, so English in their depth of feeling, I have never thought of them when looking at this river. It has become for me—I hope I shall not shock you—a political river. I think of its stormy origin, up in those great Northern moors, and it reminds me of our Scandinavian origin. I think of its beautiful and peaceful curves through the park, and they remind me of our feudalism, our prosperity, our domestic happiness, our character; they are so full of *As You Like It* and *L'Allegro* and Andrew Marvell; do you know what I mean? Then comes this sudden plunge, and, after the plunge, broken waters, a course strewn with rocks, and, finally, no individual river at all—nothing but the salt, estranging sea."

She thought for a moment, and then asked him what the Force meant to him—something that had been in English history, or something that was still ahead of us?

He said, "I agree with the duke. I am not a Tory, but I agree with him in his feeling about 1832. That was the beginning. The Reform Act. Democracy—democracy before education. It was not the plunge; it was the quickening of the waters towards a plunge of some kind. I think the great plunge is before us, and, whatever its character, I am sure that the course of our history will be vastly different."

They were still standing at the open window, hardly speaking, when the door opened behind them and Herbert entered the room. They did not hear him, so great was the noise of the falling water, and for a moment, because the room was unlighted, he did not think that they were there. On seeing them at last he half checked, but went forward again, and, touching Montgomery on the arm, made them aware of his presence.

"We have not been wasting our time in waiting for you," said Montgomery, as he closed the window.

Herbert took a spill from the mantelpiece, lighted the candles, and then pushed up a chair to the fire for Isabel.

"Has Mr. Montgomery explained to you——" he began, but Montgomery interrupted him.

"Not yet. Mr. Stretton," he continued, turning to Isabel as Herbert approached him with a box of cigarettes, "is anxious to get your opinion about a speech which we have composed together for to-morrow's luncheon, when he addresses the tenants. He thought you would not mind if I read it to you. It is quite brief."

Herbert lighted a spill at the fire and held it to Montgomery's cigarette; then, throwing the paper into the fire, he picked up a pipe from the mantelpiece and carried it to the tobacco-bowl on the table.

"I hope you don't mind, Isabel," he said, without looking at her; "but ever since you put me right in the matter of those plans——"

"Of course I don't mind."

"This is the speech," said Montgomery, and began to read.

He sat under a candlestick on the mantelpiece in a high-backed walnut chair of Charles the Second's day, one of his long legs crossed easily over the other, the smouldering cigarette half raised in his right hand, the manuscript in his left, his rich voice giving its rightful value to every word in the homely speech. Isabel was so fascinated by his romantic appearance, and by the sensitive beauty of his refined face, that she found it difficult to attend with real concentration to the speech, and almost easy to ignore the thought of Herbert's presence at her side.

When the reading was over, Montgomery lowered the paper and looked across at her with a smiling inquiry. "Does it pass muster?" he asked.

"It is a quite beautiful speech," she said quietly.

"You really think so?" he asked, with a slight flash of pleasure in his eyes.

"I think it is excellent," said Herbert. "I can say so, because it is all Mr. Montgomery's; not a word is mine."

"It might so easily," said Isabel—and Montgomery listened to her with evident attention, close attention, and even eager attention—"have been too formal or too colloquial. I should think it was most difficult to get such a speech just right—not too much above the heads of the audience, and

not too condescendingly down to their level. It seems to me really perfect in its tone and spirit. And it is also sincere, which is the great thing. May I look at it a moment?" She leant forward and stretched out her hand for the manuscript.

Montgomery rose and gave it to her, and Herbert got up, lifted a candlestick from the mantelpiece, setting it on a table at her side. As she read Montgomery watched her, and Herbert smoked his pipe, staring into the fire.

At the end of her reading Isabel again expressed admiration for the speech, but suggested one slight alteration in a final phrase—not that the phrase was not admirable in every way, she explained, but because she did not think it was characteristic of Herbert, not quite as he would have put the matter. A rather fine word was recommended to be deleted, and a more homely word was suggested to take its place.

"You are a most gifted critic, Miss Townley," said Montgomery, rising again to receive the manuscript from her hand; "and let me assure you that, without consulting Mr. Stretton, I shall make that correction—that most valuable correction."

Herbert turned to her. "Thanks awfully, Isabel," he said, with great sincerity, and then, glancing quickly at Montgomery, he said, "Would you mind going down to the ballroom? I've got to take Miss Townley to my grandfather, who has retired for the night, but wants to see her before she goes."

"Thus," said Montgomery, "is the faithful servant summarily dismissed when his services are no longer needed. May I, Miss Townley, get a programme for you and write my name against—how many?—two, three—may I have three dances? A thousand thanks! I will await you at the door of the ballroom."

No sooner had Montgomery made an appearance in the ballroom than he was asked by someone if he had seen Mrs. Townley, who was looking for him. He replied that he had not seen that lady, and possessed himself of two programmes. A few moments afterwards Mr. Townley came up. "We are looking for my daughter," he said. "Our carriage is ordered, and my wife is anxious to get hold of her."

Montgomery replied, "The last time I saw her she was with Mr. Stretton."

"Where was that?"

He hesitated. He liked Miss Townley, and he thought Herbert would not welcome an interruption of his talk with her. "Well, I think it was somewhere upstairs."

"Was that during the fireworks?"

"A little after, perhaps."

"Thank you; I'll go to look for her. If you should see my wife, perhaps you'll be so kind as to tell her."

It was not till three-quarters of an hour had passed away that Isabel was discovered.

Mrs. Townley was standing by the fire in the hall, very austere and extremely impatient, when Isabel came down the stairs with Herbert.

"We have been looking for you everywhere," said her mother, holding out her daughter's cloak.

"But, mother, are we going?" cried Isabel. She made a little mouth of disappointment, but turned her back to receive the cloak at her mother's hands. "I have been to see the duke," she explained.

"He has retired for the night," added Herbert.

Mrs. Townley was perplexed. Something in the brightness of Isabel's eyes startled her. She wondered whether she had been wise to order her carriage. Anger, perhaps, had made her too precipitate.

"Mother," said Isabel, with sudden impulsiveness, putting her fingers on one of Mrs. Townley's hands, "it's a great secret, but I may as well tell you that Herbert and I——"

The ground seemed to go from under Mrs. Townley's feet.

"My dear Herbert," she exclaimed, stretching out her hand to him with all her old candour and pleasant freshness, "I hadn't the ghost of an idea——"

"I'm going over to see you the day after to-morrow," he said. "There's such a rush of things on just now."

At this point Mr. Townley arrived on the scene.

"Isabel dear," said her mother, holding the child's hands very proudly, "the carriage is waiting for us. It's such a long drive. I don't like your father being out in the cold. Do you mind? I hope you're not disappointed? Of course, if I had known——"

Isabel turned to Herbert. "I promised to dance with Mr. Montgomery," she exclaimed. "Will you explain to him? And please tell him how sorry I am."

Hardly were the words out of her mouth than Montgomery, with the two programmes in his gloved hand, came into the hall, searching for Isabel. A moment afterwards and Lord Hawthorpe of Glantingham was at his side, thrusting forward to reach Isabel first. The two men stood in front of Isabel, rivals for her favour; the one eager, impulsive, sure of himself, and quick with all the easy and outward gallantry of his

kind ; the other quiet and restrained, watchful and reflective, a little tragic even, waiting with a certain sadness of appeal for the girl's notice.

Mrs. Townley turned to Herbert. "There is one condition," she half whispered to him.

"What is that?"

"That you do not expect me to ask Lady Theresa to the wedding. I purposely intend not to say good-night to her."

Mr. Townley could not understand what they were whispering about, nor what had occurred to make his angry and indignant wife so suddenly pleasant. But he was to be even more astonished.

"It won't hurt the horses," exclaimed Mrs. Townley, "to keep them five minutes longer. I think I will say good-night to Lady Theresa after all. Come, Herbert, take us in. You needn't come, Christopher. Get your coat on. We will be back in a few minutes."

No words with which we are acquainted can express the feeling of Mrs. Townley as she entered the crowded ballroom. The duke's heir was at her side ; Hawthorpe and Montgomery followed in her train with Isabel between them. Cloaked for the long journey home, so that she attracted universal notice, Mrs. Townley sailed into the room like an empress, and, throwing her smiles to right and left of her, made her way to the place where Lady Theresa was working her fan and breathing hard, all unaware of Mrs. Townley's approach.

The band played when she was half way up the room, as if to salute her triumph, and nobody danced till she was nearly at the end of her journey. Whom she saw on that progress we do not know, for she told nobody save Roscoe, who carried the secret to her grave ; but there is reason to think that she nodded to the archbishop in his plum-coloured clothes, and let her smiling eyes rest with cheerful amusement on quite a number of the faded ladies in coronets, ignoring the handsome gentlemen who were wearing their orders and the bibulous nonentity who had taken her in to dinner. One person only she wanted to see, and of one person only was she thinking as she made that splendid progress up the brilliant room.

Lady Theresa screwed round and became aware of her. Her face hardened. She stared angrily. Her fan stopped working. Mrs. Townley, brisk, upright, and alert, put out her hand. She said nothing ; but her smile was enough.

Lady Theresa touched the extended hand, and gaped at her

as she stood aside for Isabel to take her farewell. She scarcely saw Isabel as the girl's fingers touched her hand. "Herbert," she said, "I want you; don't go away." But Herbert said, "I will come back to you when I have seen Mrs. Townley to her carriage"; and those words were Mrs. Townley's greatest triumph. She approached Lady Theresa once more. "A most successful party," she said with conviction, and turned her back.

No sooner had the carriage moved away from the castle than, greatly excited and joyous in her exceeding triumph, she said to her husband: "Christopher dear, I want you to kiss on both cheeks the future Duchess of Rothbury." Before the astonished Mr. Townley could obey this wish Mrs. Townley put an arm round Isabel's neck, drew the child towards her, kissed her on the forehead, and exclaimed, "Darling child, I am more proud of you than I can say. Now tell us all about it. How did it happen? When did it happen? Had——"

But she was still thinking of Lady Theresa.

"God bless my soul!" cried Mr. Townley.

XVIII

WHEN Herbert, who was as ignorant as Isabel on the matter of his great-grandfather's summons, opened the door of the duke's room on that important night, the first thing which met Isabel's eyes was a formidable four-poster bed, which looked like a sepulchral monument in a Roman basilica. It was shadowy, impressive, and solemn, hung with dark-green curtains, and dimly lighted by two candles in tall silver sticks burning on a bedside table.

She entered the room nervously, in advance of Herbert, and, while she was hesitating for him to close the door and again go ahead of her, she saw a broad couch at the foot of the monumental four-poster. It was spread with a white sheet and furnished with white pillows. Behind its head was a table loaded with bottles and shining with certain surgical-looking instruments.

Before she had seen these things with any degree of clearness, however, she became aware of the duke himself, and went forward into the uncertain light of the big room to greet him, quickening her step and smiling a little nervously.

He seemed to her at first absurdly small, and even a trifle ludicrous. He was crouched up, and leaning forward in a high-backed chair covered with dark tapestry, wearing a

worn dressing-gown of scarlet silk, with a white shawl thrown over his knees. This big chair was set back at a comfortable distance from a bright fire, and was as much lost in the large room as the little old man himself was dwarfed by its depths. He reminded Isabel, in his scarlet dressing-gown, of coloured pictures she had seen of Her Majesty's judges, and the obstinate tuft of white hair sticking up from his forehead seemed to suggest to her that he had just pulled off a wig. But before she had touched his hand she felt only his tragic helplessness, and when he forced up his eyes to look at her, still leaning outwards from the chair in a way which suggested that at any moment he might fall forward on his face, she stooped down to him with a pang in her heart which drove away all troublesome self-consciousness.

"You do not mind, I hope, coming to see me in my hospital?" he began, smiling at her, his hands twitching in front of him.

Herbert placed a chair for Isabel, and then stood beside the mantelpiece, a little behind her, facing towards the duke.

"Of course not," she said in her gentle voice, bending forward in her chair, her beautiful white arms resting on her knees, her eyes full of sympathy and kindness.

"I must not keep you from the dance, however," continued the duke; "but there are just one or two questions I wanted to ask you before you go home."

"Please, duke," said Isabel, "don't think I want to be dancing. Please don't. I like to think you sent for me. I like to be here."

"Well, in any case, I shan't keep you long. You see, I've got to be drubbed, and pummelled, and punched before I go to bed. I daresay you kneaded dough as a child, and so you will know all about it. That's why I'm such a crusty old man, my dear—if you'll forgive a very crude pun. By the way, I've never heard Herbert make a pun in his life. I don't think he could. But all this is by the way. What I want to ask you, Isabel, is this, Have you any feeling of dislike for our old castle?"

"No, duke; of course not!"

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure; why should I?"

"You do not feel, my dear, that it is—hush! I hope no one is listening to us—that it is haunted?"

"I have never thought about such a thing."

"Ghosts are terrible things. Their chains rattle. Their

teeth knock together. On a moonlight night they are enough to frighten even a Bradlaugh out of his senses, if the rascal has any."

Isabel saw that he was in playful mood, but could not think what he was driving at.

The duke said, "Someone was asked, 'Do you believe in ghosts?' and made the answer, 'No, but I'm afraid of them.' However, you are not afraid of ghosts, and you don't dislike DurrIDGE?"

"No, duke."

"Well, I've got an idea that these celebrations are rather a failure, from Herbert's point of view. I don't think he cares about them. They're not in his line. I feel, therefore, that I should like to give him a present to make up for his disappointment. I tried him with pocket-money this morning, and he very nearly threw it into the fire; you ask Mr. Colby. Evidently it is not money he wants. What is it he wants? Can you tell me? Perhaps you wouldn't mind asking him. Ask him what it is he wants most in the world—not now, but when you're alone with him. I'd like to think before I bid him good-night that I had helped to give him the gift that will make him perfectly happy. Will you allow me to feel that I have done so? Will you allow me to feel that I have had just a little to do with the matter?"

Isabel had been startled long before the conclusion of this appeal. When it came to an end, and there was nothing for it but to answer the duke, she turned her head and looked at Herbert. For the first time in her life she saw the fire of animation in his face, and knew that he loved her. Delighted, bewildered, a wonderful world opening before her eyes, she rose slowly from her chair, hesitated a moment, threw another glance at Herbert, and then went over to the duke, dropping on one knee and stooping her head to kiss one of his poor, helpless hands.

Herbert, who had been as greatly surprised by the duke's words as Isabel herself, awkwardly crossed the room, and placed one of his hands on her shoulder, standing there and looking down on her, too moved and too acutely self-conscious for words of any kind.

"A present should always be a surprise," said the duke, rather shakily in the voice; "and it should also be a secret. Let us keep this present to ourselves until Theresa Grantham has left us desolate with her farewells. Herbert hates a fuss. So do I. Now, my dear, go down to the ballroom. But be

careful. Don't give Herbert too many dances. And, even if he should tread on your toes, forgive him ; for he's a very good fellow—one of the best I have ever known. Aren't you Herbert ? ”

When Herbert had told the duke that, unless he had any objections, he intended riding over to Cumberfield to consult Isabel about his speech to the tenants, the old man had seen where the boy's affections were centred, and had reflected upon the matter in his loneliness. Herbert returned from that vain ride and reported that Mrs. Townley and Isabel were in London. The duke saw in his face and felt in his manner that the boy, usually so self-possessed, was all at sea with disappointment. Evidently he leaned on Isabel.

During the days that elapsed after this experience the duke, anxious to make his great-grandson's birthday celebrations a real success, in spite of Theresa's insistence on various high-jinks which he knew Herbert thoroughly disliked, toyed with the idea of giving his consent to an engagement which would make Herbert a very happy man. He talked, as we have seen, to Robert Finch and to Aylmer Montgomery about Herbert's career, but he was still undecided in the matter until the very morning of Herbert's birthday, and how he came finally to make up his mind was in this fashion.

After breakfast he saw Herbert in the presence of Mr. Colby, his legal adviser, and told the boy what he had done in the matter of a settlement. Herbert's income from the estate of his parents would now be £15,000 a year ; five years ago the duke himself had settled a capital sum upon him which produced an annual income of £5,000 a year ; he now intended to execute such a settlement as would provide Herbert with an extra £10,000 a year, making up his total annual income to £30,000. Further, the duke had instructed Mr. Colby to draw up a deed of gift handing over to Herbert all his landed property in various parts of the country, together with the house in Belgrave Square, and this document would be signed before the birthday celebrations were completed.

Herbert's response to this generosity brought a smile to the judicious, thin lips of Mr. Colby and something very like tears to the eyes of the old duke. “ I do not see, sir,” he had said, “ any necessity for these legal documents. I am perfectly content to go on just as we are. In fact, I rather object, if you will allow me to say so, to anything which makes a difference in our present relations.”

"But," the duke had replied, "you will need money for your cottages!"

"It had never occurred to me," was Herbert's answer, "that you would refuse to pay that bill, sir."

"There is one person at least in the world, Colby," said the duke, "who will not turn a hair when the archangel blows the last trump."

"I take your Grace's meaning," said the lawyer, with a smile that seemed merely to open its eyes for a moment and then go to sleep again.

Pleased and touched by the boy's attitude in this matter, the duke was finally influenced that same day towards giving his consent to an engagement with Isabel by a conversation with Lord Hawthorpe.

Hawthorpe was a distant relation of the duke, and a descendant of a long line of barons famous through history for vigorous thinking and vigorous action. He was a Master of Fox Hounds, a famous cross-country rider, a member of the Four-in-Hand Club, a steward of the Jockey Club, a promising member of the House of Lords, and a patron of the arts. Pinched as he was financially by the agricultural depression which had lasted now for over twelve years, this gay-hearted and handsome young man had kept himself rigorously clear of commercial adventures; had maintained—if anything, had even strengthened—the aristocratic exclusiveness for which his family was famous; and had announced that he would never bring a lady to Glantingham, to take his mother's place at the head of the table, who had not got at least three generations of fox-hunting and Toryism in her blood. Although a young man, and in the first flight of the young men of his day, Hawthorpe preserved all the ancient forms of aristocratic dignity, and set his face sternly against the free-and-easy insincerities of a democratic society. He fulminated against the lying familiarity of modern tradesmen, who presumed to address gentlemen as "Dear Sir," instead of "Sir," mocked the absurd use then being made of the term "lady," and never addressed a man of superior rank to his own without all those courtesies which were taken for granted in his grandfather's lifetime.

"I'd like to know, Arthur, what you think of Herbert?" asked the duke. "How do you think he's shaping?"

Hawthorpe, who could look very like a groom on occasion, narrowed his eyes, screwed up a corner of his mouth, and appeared to be sniffing for a fox.

"I'm sure your Grace means that I am to say exactly what I think," he said suddenly, as if his mind were made up. Then he leaned forward, looked the duke intently in the eyes, and continued as follows: "If Herbert were a pointer, I should call him a potterer, and shoot him. If he were a horse, I might ride him to a meet, but never to hounds. In my judgment, he's neither a scug nor a sap, but something in between. I should call him a good slow 'un. I'd like him near me in a tight corner, but I should never expect to see him in anything that resembled a burst. Is that what your Grace thinks of him. I've spoken quite freely."

The duke nodded his head. "But he's a thoroughly good fellow," he said with a quiet decision; and he repeated still more quietly, "a thoroughly good fellow."

Hawthorpe considered that judgment. "I've had a longish talk with the boy," he said slowly. "That's to say, duke, I did all the talking. I think he took what I said very well. I told him he ought to start a pack of hounds, join the Yeomanry, and go in for stock-raising on a princely scale. That's the future of farming in this country—blood stock. We beat the rest of the world hands down in that matter. They can't get on without our blood in the Argentine; they've tried to breed from their own stock and they can't do it; it's a failure. They must have fresh blood every season."

"Politics you don't recommend?"

Again Hawthorpe screwed up his eyes and drew his mouth to one side before he made answer.

"My view is," he said, "that no man, and no woman, and no horse, is fit for the big things of life without a spice of the devil in them. It seems to me—but your Grace must correct me if I am wrong—that the human race may be roughly divided into those who have a bit of the devil in their blood and those who haven't. Herbert, so far as I can judge, has no devil in him. He's not hard. He's straight, but he's not hard. He lacks hardness. Nature has marked him out for a quiet life. Let him marry a woman cleverer than himself, but one who admires him and won't presume to dominate over him; let him cultivate the affection of people who live by the land; let him be a great English landlord, the greatest thing any man can be; and don't let him attempt to follow a way of life in which he could only prove himself a failure. That's my view. I can't see Herbert shining. But I can see him doing his duty."

The duke said, "But doesn't his duty involve political functions?"

To this Hawthorne replied that unless a great nobleman was a born statesman or a born orator the best way in which he could perform his political duties was by maintaining the old and affectionate relation which existed in England between the territorial lord and his peasantry. "We must leave the towns to clever Tory lawyers and bagmen who know their business, hoping they'll keep the Radicals at bay for another generation; and we, who understand the English people, must make the country the impregnable stronghold of traditional Toryism. We must keep Joseph Arch out of our grounds. The country must be England."

"But is that possible with Free Trade?"

"It is our last chance, duke. And men like Herbert, slow thinking, sure footed, and absolutely sincere, living among their people and maintaining the old traditions, may do more than many a political windbag to save the country from the Radicals. He has got sound ideas about the land. He sees the necessity for big farms, and the use of machinery. He's running with his head down all right, but whether he's marking the line of the old fox or a new one I'm not so sure. But he's young yet. We shall know more about him in five years' time."

"I should like," said the duke, but not wistfully, "to know something more about him now."

Hawthorne glanced at him, and knew what he meant. Yes, in five years' time the old duke would have looked his last on the English shires, and heard his last gossip from modern Babylon. "Let me say this," he said with conviction; "if I had a sister in want of a husband I'd sooner see her married to Herbert than any other man of my acquaintance." He paused, and then proceeded less seriously: "My only real fear about the lad is that he's so absorbed in farming that he'll do nothing for sport, and never give himself the trouble to know anything about the beautiful things in this castle. Perhaps he'll find a wife who will do that side of his life for him. It's important. It's a part of our duty. The aristocracy should love sport and keep English art healthy. Priggishness, which is the pup of Liberalism and effeminacy, is one of the worst enemies of the old order. Your Grace perhaps doesn't know how this disease is spreading. Affectation is a kind of cult. We've got to fight it; and the best way to fight it is by maintaining the old traditions. After all,

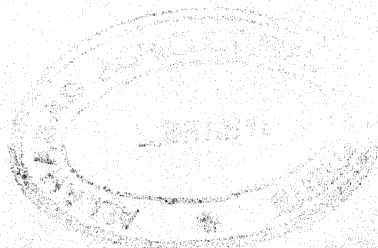
duke, who was it gave England its literature, its music, its pictures, its furniture, its gardens, its parks, its architecture—everything that's fine and splendid—if it wasn't the fox-hunting gentleman? To hear the Radicals talk, you'd think we must go to Russia for our books, Germany for our music, France for our comedies, and God knows where for our common sense. It's an essential part of Radicalism to despise everything English and to grovel before everything foreign. The damn fellows profess to think that fox-hunting is cruel, and that every aristocrat is a boor. I'd like to set my bitch pack on them!"

The duke, resting on his couch, reflected on these honest opinions of Arthur Hawthorpe up to dinner-time, and the more he turned them over in his mind the more did he come to think that Herbert ought to be allowed to follow the life of a landowner, for which he entertained a genuine passion, and that Isabel, who was distinctly clever and not without spirit, might very well play the part of a perfect wife, as Hawthorpe conceived it. She might well inspire Herbert in many ways, and help him in everything he attempted; certainly she would never be likely to ride roughshod over his sensibilities.

"They will be very happy," he assured himself, "in a thoroughly dull way," and flattered himself that if he outlived "old Gladstone" he would perhaps have time to guide Isabel into a way of looking at life which would be useful to her, and to her children, when he was dead and gone.

One thing was uppermost in the old man's mind—the desire to see Herbert happy.

BOOK II



BOOK II

I

As Mrs. Townley described it—and she was given to untruth only in the interests of morality and religion—the marriage of Herbert and Isabel was one of the most beautiful and affecting ceremonies ever witnessed by human eyes.

“I could not think,” she told her friends, “how the drawing-room at DurrIDGE could possibly be converted into anything resembling a sacred building; but, really, as long as I live I shall never forget entering that room—the instant feeling that came to me, *This is sacred ground*. I cannot explain it. But there it was. *This is sacred ground*. The dear archbishop, who stayed with us, drove over to the castle with Mr. Montgomery some few hours before we did, in order to arrange matters; but he told me that there was little for him to alter; everything was perfect, and nearly everything was the work of the servants themselves. I am sure that Soulsby, the butler, and Catchside, the head gardener, must have beautiful minds. How lovely the flowers were, and how perfectly they were grouped! Just when the archbishop was making the dear young people man and wife the April sun came out, shone through the streaming windows, and lighted all those flowers, so that the whole room seemed literally to glow with benediction.”

She went on to tell her friends how affected she had been by the rows of servants, and the rows of the old people from the estate, including colliers and quarrymen, all kneeling in that room and praying for the happiness of the young people. This sight impressed her even more than the spectacle of the beautiful and benign archbishop, in his splendid robes, bending over the young couple in a manner so fatherly and tender that it brought tears to the eyes. Most touching too, was the sight of the old duke in his wheel-chair, nodding his head, half smiling and half weeping, but every now and then lifting up his eyes and flashing a look down the crowded apartment, as if he half expected “old Gladstone,” who had just then introduced his second Home Rule Bill, to appear, and intended to order him out of the room.

“But perhaps,” she laughed, “he was thinking only of

that dreadful old woman, Lady Theresa Grantham, who was purposely *not* asked to the wedding, and who in consequence is perfectly furious. She is actually telling people in London, so I hear, the most absurd stories about Isabel! If she had dared to appear, I believe it might have given the duke his death, he so thoroughly reprobates her way of living."

The person to whom Mrs. Townley most liked to speak about this beautiful and affecting wedding was Roscoe, who had been present, and who could confirm every word of Mrs. Townley's epithalamium, and who could, moreover, tell her what the housekeeper at Durridge had said about it, and how Mr. Soulsby, the butler, had told her that he and he alone would wait upon the young couple at dinner that night—not a footman should come near them.

Great lady though she was, and occupied with many serious affairs, Mrs. Townley's curiosity about the attitude of the servants at Durridge towards Isabel could never be fully satisfied. Often was Roscoe sent over to pay a visit to the housekeeper in the late spring of 1893—"It will do you good and exercise the horses," said Mrs. Townley—and always after such visits the conversation of mistress and maid lasted till the rest of the household at Cumberfield were fast asleep.

It appeared from Roscoe's report that everybody adored Isabel. There was not a servant in the house who did not think her the loveliest lady they had ever seen. They all spoke of two things: her sweetness and her cleverness. She was so sweet and condescending to everyone she spoke to, and yet they all knew that the duke never tired of her conversation, and that Mr. Stretton was always asking her advice. They thought that no lady had ever looked quite so well on horseback, but what impressed them more than anything else was the fact that she spent so much time in the library reading books—some of them books of such enormous size and such prodigious weight that they had to be placed on a reading-desk. Undoubtedly, in spite of her beauty, she was a lady of the greatest conceivable learning.

If Roscoe's report was to be believed, Durridge was all the better and all the happier for Isabel's presence. Every afternoon, Roscoe learned, she and Herbert Stretton set out to call upon the cottagers, sometimes walking across the park with their pointers and retrievers, sometimes driving out to the mining villages and to the scattered cottages of the quarrymen, and sometimes riding to a lonely hamlet

hidden in the moors. "It doesn't look, dear ma'am," said Roscoe, "as if they wanted to see anything of the gentry; and the general opinion is that Mr. Stretton is going to stand for Parliament."

Happy as she was in the knowledge that Isabel had won all hearts at Durrige, Mrs. Townley was troubled by the attitude of her daughter towards the great question of total abstinence. Brewing was not merely carried on at Durrige, but Herbert Stretton, so Roscoe learned, was extending the old brewhouse, and making arrangements for supplying ale to all the workers on his estate. Durrige ale appeared on his own table at luncheon, even sometimes at breakfast, and after dinner he usually drank a glass of port. Mrs. Townley began to feel more and more acutely that her advocacy of total abstinence was gravely compromised by this behaviour on the part of her son-in-law.

"I am going over to luncheon at Durrige," she told her husband at their early breakfast one morning. "Isabel says in her letter that she would like you to come, too, but supposes that nothing will tear you from the ironworks."

"Quite impossible, my dear; we are very busy. Give her my love."

"I am glad she has asked me," said Mrs. Townley, folding up the letter and restoring it to the pile beside her plate. "I want to have a good talk with her."

The phrase "a good talk" in Mrs. Townley's mind usually meant a dogmatic lecture, and Mr. Townley glanced up at his wife apprehensively, and waited for her to continue.

"I feel strongly," she said, "that Herbert ought not to encourage beer-drinking. It is setting a terrible example. It compromises a good deal of my work."

The ironmaster had not taken his gaze from her face, and there was something in the expression of his eyes which warned her of danger.

"I daresay you think I ought not to interfere," she continued; "and I have no wish, I can assure you, to play the proverbial part of a mother-in-law. But I do mean to speak to Isabel, and nothing will turn me from *that*."

Mr. Townley shook his head. "I should leave the young people, if I were you, to order their own lives," he said quietly, but with a noticeable touch of warning in his voice.

"Isabel is still my daughter," rejoined Mrs. Townley; "and if she is to fulfil my prayers for her influence on English society when she is the duchess she will certainly not resent

my discussing with her a subject of such great importance as temperance."

Earnestly as Mrs. Townley desired and intended to speak to her erring daughter on this important question of total abstinence, all idea of the matter was put out of her head by the information imparted to her by Isabel a few minutes after her arrival. At once Mrs. Townley became the comforting and experienced mother. There was nothing to worry about. All would go well. Isabel must not ride any more. She must take walking exercise, but avoid fatigue. She must lie down every afternoon. She must do this, that, and the other thing—a veritable prescription covering every hour of the day.

At luncheon, of course, the conversation took a different turn. First the duke began by telling Mrs. Townley that he daily thanked God for the unspeakable mercy that Isabel did not take after her mother. "I don't believe," he said, "that it has ever once entered her head that she should try to make anybody better. Her one mission in life, so far as I can judge, is to make everybody happier. That's her only form of proselytising, and, as I tell you, I thank God for it."

"My dear duke," rejoined Mrs. Townley, "if I were to tell you of the homes in this country made *happier* because the fathers and the mothers had been made *better* you would double your subscription to the Church of England Temperance Society, and never again say unkind things about proselytising."

The duke laughed, and replied that if he had the use of his hands he should always button up his pockets at the first approach of Mrs. Townley. "I am for ever intending to tell Colby," he went on, "to get me out a statement of the money I have subscribed to charities since you first crossed my sceptical path; and also a statement showing the increase in crime and Radicalism during those expensive years. You might make a note of the matter, Herbert. It's worth taking up."

"I hear," said Mrs. Townley, turning to her son-in-law, "that you are nursing the constituency, and intend to stand at the next election. I hope it is true."

"It isn't," said Herbert, and gave her a look which rather frightened her. He could not think how she could say such a thing. Before there was another election he would, almost certainly, be no longer eligible for the House of Commons. How could she say such a thing before the duke?

Isabel saved the situation. "Herbert is much too busy for politics," she told her mother. "He has joined the Yeomanry, and has already got over forty men from the estate to join up, most of whom will provide their own horses. And now, very soon, he is going to stay with Arthur Hawthorpe, so as to learn how to start a pack of hounds. We are going to be very busy here."

"You see," put in the duke, "there are more forms of proselytising than one. Hawthorpe is a proselytiser. He's a proselytiser for old English traditions. He took such a fancy to our ale, for example, that he wouldn't rest till Herbert had undertaken to extend the brewhouse. He'd use our ale as you use a tract. He'd like all England to drink it. He says that what the nation most needs is home-brewed ale and home-baked bread. The baker and the brewer between them, so he tells me, are destroying the nation. If the people ate wholemeal bread and drank home-brewed ale there'd be no Radicals. Another thing he proselytises about is racing. He wants a racecourse near every big city. Take away from an Englishman his love for good beer, sound bread, and a fine horse, and you get one of these confounded cosmopolitan humbugs who hate their country, and want to turn everything upside down. Now, Hawthorpe is a proselytiser on right lines, and he has never in his life asked me for a florin. You should ask him to stay with you. I'd like to drink a glass of Cumberland ale, and send a DurrIDGE two-year-old to race against the Cumberland crack on the Cumberland racecourse. Yes, that would be very jolly. Why not?"

Mrs. Townley remembered the look in her husband's eyes when he said to her at breakfast, "I should leave the young people, if I were you, to order their own lives." Perhaps he was right. At any rate, who could be angry with the duke?

After luncheon she sat with Isabel in the garden talking of a matter more to her heart than even total abstinence; and all her thoughts were of this great and exciting matter as she drove home behind her tall horses to the evangelical atmosphere of Cumberland.

II

TOWARDS the end of the London season Mr. Robert Finch drove one afternoon from his little house in Charles Street, Mayfair, to the more impressive house of Lady Theresa Grantham in Wilton Crescent.

His morocco-lined brougham was hung on the most accommodating of C-springs and leather braces, riding only a few inches above the ground on wheels heavily tyred with rubber. It was drawn by an old, heavy-boned horse, who kept his neck arched and his head down by means of a bearing-rein, apparently proudly conscious of the dark-green rosettes with fluttering ribbons attached to his brow band. This old horse, who had only one pace, and that a slow one, sweated freely in hot weather.

From the lowered window of his comfortable little carriage Mr. Finch looked mournfully out upon a world which appeared to grow younger every day, and every day to become more cruelly indifferent to his existence. He sat well back in his seat, grasping with one of his white-gloved hands the double strap of puffed leather beside the door, and restlessly tapping his varnished boot with a malacca cane held in the other. He wore a tall hat amply too large for him, with the brim well over his eyes. In his black satin cravat was a pear-shaped pearl pin, and in the buttonhole of his frock-coat a white gardenia.

He hummed and hawed to himself as the brougham joined the string of carriages, hansom cabs, and horse-buses moving down Piccadilly towards the Park. Wonderful where all these people came from! Every season London appeared to become more enormous. Every year society appeared to become more numerous. The old peace, the old dignity, had entirely disappeared. Women were changing in a very remarkable fashion. They were becoming hard. Romance, apparently, had had its day. Who could make love to a woman who wobbled a straw about in her mouth at Tattersall's and joked with trainers at the sale of two-year-olds at Newmarket? Quite young girls had this look of hardness in their faces. They were contemptuous of frivolity, but were serious about things with which they had no concern. He pitied the young men of the day. No wonder women of forty were besieged by lovers.

Well, it would not be long before he closed his eyes on this changing world. No doubt he would be sorry to leave it; no doubt he might have difficulty in composing his thoughts on his deathbed; but every season would certainly make it easier for him to take leave of a world which commercialism had vulgarised, and the soul of which Darwin had destroyed.

He was wondering whether he was descended from a fallen angel or a climbing ape when the brougham swung into Wilton

Crescent, and presently pulled smoothly up at the bright painted door and beflowered front of Lady Theresa's house, which looked all the better for the striped awnings over the windows.

"Is her ladyship alone, Rivers?" he inquired in the hall, as the butler took his hat and stick. Mr. Finch was thinking to himself, "Your nose is several degrees redder, my friend, since I last saw you, and your clothes altogether too shabby for a respectable servant."

"No, sir. Sir Anthony Holton is with her ladyship."

Mr. Finch pondered this information as he drew off his gloves. "Oh, Sir Anthony Holton. Hum. Well, I'll go up." Deferentially, slowing his step to accommodate the lumbering movements of Mr. Finch, Rivers led the way up the twisting staircase, with its thick, claret-coloured carpet and its blue and white china in the recesses of the wall.

Lady Theresa frowned towards the opening door of her drawing-room, and waited with an annoyed look on her huge face for the servant's announcement. The red and white striped awnings pulled over the French windows, which were open, saved the gilt gorgeousness of this untidy room from garishness by the softness of the light which entered both through awnings and lace curtains. In this subdued light the pale face of Lady Theresa, which never grew pink in argument or in the worst of the dog days, had a cold, greyish look which was disagreeable to a sensitive mind.

"Mr. Robert Finch, my lady," said Rivers.

"Damn!" said her ladyship, under her breath, and slipped between herself and her chair a number of papers which she had been discussing with Holton. Holton himself rose, walked towards the hearth, turned round to face the door, and quietly inserted a similar sheaf of papers into the tail-pocket of his frock-coat, which was not quite so well brushed as it might have been.

Mr. Finch, breathing a little heavily, lumbered into the room with all the happy ease of an old friend, and advanced towards Lady Theresa with an extended hand, a sorrowful but loving smile on his good-natured face.

"Ah, Theresa," he exclaimed, "I am happy to find you at home. I half-feared that you might have left town. How are you, my dear?"

"Very ill, very angry, and very thirsty. You know Sir Anthony Holton? Yes, of course. Call Rivers back, Sir Anthony, and we'll have a whiskey and syphon. I've given

up tea. It's a disgusting habit. No wonder it's so popular in the middle classes. I understand that whenever the Dissenters want to praise the Lord in a secular fashion they always order tea and buns. If the Lord isn't satisfied, I'm sure they are. They see to that. They blow themselves out to the glory of God. Disgusting people! Well, Robert, what is your news?" She rolled her head, pursed her lips, and looked at her visitor with vexation and contempt in her staring eyes.

Mr. Finch's news did not appear to interest Lady Theresa. As far as it was possible for a person of her bulk to do so, she fidgeted in her chair, and kept saying, "Oh, I've heard that," or "Well, I always expected something of the kind to happen." But she became less fidgety when the whiskey arrived, and sitting back in her chair, tumbler in hand, her feet on a foot-stool, began to philosophise in her highly dictatorial manner.

"You rather amuse me, Robert," she exclaimed, looking Mr. Finch in the eyes and giving a little jerk to her head. "You cling to the world, don't you? You cling, that is to say, to the ruins of a world which fifty years ago was as cheerful as the Pavilion or the Empire, but isn't now. I daresay you've never heard of those places. I daresay you have never heard of Bessie Belwood, Belle Bilton, and Charles Coborn. That only shows how you cling to a ruin. When I was a girl people doted on architectural ruins. They were thought to be romantic. How stupid that was. Byronism! The sorrows of Werther! Very unhealthy. Most unhealthy. Morbid. And that's what you are doing now. Smoke, Sir Anthony, please. You'll find cigarettes on that table. If there aren't any matches there, ring the bell and I'll discharge Rivers. I'm sure he is stealing my whiskey. Robert, you may smoke a cigar if you want one, and if you have got one in your pocket. I don't keep them. As I was saying, you are a romantic person. You are very old-fashioned. You are a sort of social Byron, a sort of fashionable Werther. You love the Gothic arches of the 'fifties and the moonlight of your romantic youth. You haunt ruins—the ruins of your shameful past. I think you weep over them by moonlight. I am sure you can quote *In Memoriam* by the yard, and hum the sickly tune of Lady Arthur Hill's 'In the Gloaming.' Why don't you cultivate a new passion? The ruins of society will only give you your death of cold. You look, my dear, like one of Leech's pictures of an old gentleman with his feet in mustard and water, a nightcap on his head, and a bowl of gruel in his

hands. You've no idea how stricken you look. I can't bear to see it. Do take my advice. Burn all the love-letters written to you by married women twenty years ago ; tell your butler to give the dustman that pink satin slipper out of which you drank Mumm thirty years ago ; and give up ringing bells at houses in Mayfair and Belgravia where you dreaded forty years ago the arrival of husbands armed with hunting-crops."

Sir Anthony Holton smiled. His admiration for Lady Theresa's wit was obviously profound.

"My dear Theresa," expostulated Mr. Finch, "you shock me horribly. Even your persiflage shocks me. I assure you I have no delusions. I assure you, my dear, I have buried all my romances long ago. The only things to which I cling in these evil days——"

"Why evil days?" she interrupted. "They're very good days. I won't have a word said against them. But what is it you cling to, you poor Hamlet of the 'fifties? "

"To old friendships," said Mr. Finch very tragically.

"To old women, you mean! Old women with cold lips and scraggy necks. Ugh! How can you, Robert; how can you?"

"You are incorrigible, Theresa. I give you up. Really, I think you grow more mocking every time I meet you." He looked for sympathy towards Holton.

"Take warning, Sir Anthony," cried Lady Theresa with great animation, "from this dear old faithful friend of mine who is killing himself with *ennui*—the inevitable *ennui* of sentiment. Never stick to old friends. Go about the world making new ones. The last friendship, like the last lover, is always the most amusing. But I don't think I need preach to you. Indeed," she explained to Finch, "it is largely due to Sir Anthony, a new friend of mine—for we only met for the first time at DurrIDGE last year—that I have been able to renew my youth by means of a new vice."

Sir Anthony shook a warning head at her across the room, but she cared for nothing now, and plunged on with her subject.

"I feel very like," she said, "that absurd American woman who married Napoleon's brother and called herself Madame Bonaparte-Patteson, and who only became sensible in old age. She was a sensation before our time, Robert, but you must have heard of her. She tried very hard to blaze herself into society, and struck up a friendship with Lady Morgan, another ridiculous woman, very like that vulgar little creature who caught my nephew Herbert Stretton before I could save

him. Someone said of Madame Bonaparte-Patteson, 'She charms by her eyes and slays with her tongue.' After a life of the most lurid romance she grew old, lost her beauty, and would have died of a broken heart, like you, Robert, if she had not discovered another passion, and the greatest of them all."

"What was that?" inquired Mr. Finch, not greedily, but with a sad interest, as if wishful to know, and yet convinced he would be disappointed.

"Avarice," said Lady Theresa. She drank from her tumbler, set it down with a bang on the table beside her, wiped her lips rather violently with a lace handkerchief, and repeated the word, "Avarice."

"How sordid!" exclaimed Finch, and rolled his sorrowful eyes first to the ceiling and then to a pair of powder-blue vases on the mantelpiece which had been made in the Dr. Wall period of Worcester china, and which he had long coveted, and even ventured from time to time to hint for.

Lady Theresa soon brought him back to other matters. "Sordid!" she exclaimed. "Not at all! How ridiculous that is! But we always condemn the vices of other people. *Our* vice is the only beautiful vice. Try it, my dear Robert. It will make a new man of you. Madame Bonaparte-Patteson said in her old age, 'God has given me three passions—love, ambition, and avarice. My love is slighted, my ambition is thwarted, and I exist upon my avarice.' How that bites! She only became real when she was old."

"My dear Theresa," exclaimed Mr. Finch, "you are not serious. I am sure you cannot be serious."

Holton got up to take his leave.

"Indeed, I am," exclaimed Lady Theresa, "and for the first time in my life." She put out her hand to Holton. "Can you come to-morrow afternoon, or shall I write?" she asked, holding his hand, and looking at him intently.

"I will come with pleasure," he answered, in his softest tones.

"Come to luncheon. Two o'clock. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly. I shall be delighted."

He turned to Mr. Finch, who was standing ready to shake hands.

"I am sorry you are going, Sir Anthony," said that old gentleman; "I should have liked to hear news of my friends at Durridge. I hope they——"

"I have told Lady Theresa all I know."

'Yes, I'll pass it on to you, Robert. You dote on gossip,

and you shall have your fill. Won't you have another drink, Sir Anthony? "

Sir Anthony shook a slightly reproving head.

" *Au revoir*, then. To-morrow at two. I shall be alone. Please ring the bell, Robert."

She glanced at the papers squeezed in between herself and her chair, and then settled down to discuss the tragedy of Durrige Castle.

III

WHEN Robert Finch next saw Lady Theresa he had a report to make upon affairs at Durrige which was a very different affair from the report he had received from her at the end of the London season.

She had told him on that occasion, directly the door of her drawing-room had closed on Sir Anthony Holton, that Herbert Stretton was completely undone by his marriage; that Isabel and her dreadful mother now ruled him with a rod of iron; that "poor old George" was neglected and utterly miserable, and would starve but for the care of Soulsby, who fed him surreptitiously; that wine was banished from the dinner-table; that prayer-meetings from morning to night were the order of the day; that all the servants had given notice except poor old Soulsby; that Herbert, who hated public life in any shape or form, had nevertheless joined the Yeomanry in order to escape from so hateful a *ménage*; and, finally, that Arthur Hawthorpe, who was notoriously one of the most unconscionable corrupters of women in the country, was always at Durrige, and that whenever he left the castle Herbert's hypocritical and canting little wife immediately sent for Aylmer Montgomery.

Astonished beyond measure by this recital, and feeling deeply for his old friend George—if the recital were indeed even partially true—Robert Finch had challenged Lady Theresa for her authority, and had been told, in the significant manner always affected in such cases, that it was not *only* from Sir Anthony Holton that she had got these facts.

Disturbed in mind, for he dearly loved old George, and had a fatherly feeling for Herbert—Herbert, whom he perfectly remembered as a brave little boy on a spirited pony at meets of the York and Ainsty and the South Durhams, and on whom he had often called both at Eton and at Christ Church—Robert Finch decided that he would propose himself for a

visit to the castle directly he had got through a round of visits in the Midlands.

He went there in October, and on the day following his arrival sent the following letter to Lady Theresa Grantham in London :

"MY DEAR THERESA,—You have been *totally* misinformed. Some malicious person must purposely have misled you, for what end I cannot conceive. Never have I stayed in a happier house. My dear old friend, your venerable cousin, looks as if he will very easily achieve his wish of outliving Mr. Gladstone. Herbert is more manly than I have ever known him, and undoubtedly devoted to his wife, whom I find sympathetic, highly intelligent, and an admirable hostess. There is no sign whatever of prayer-meetings. We have family prayers before breakfast, which I think is an excellent custom, but they are simple, dignified, and short. I have seen nothing at present of Isabel's mother, but George said this morning at luncheon: 'I wish you'd get that excellent mother of yours to come over, Isabel; I miss her; she's the only person I've got left to bandy words with; I find her wonderfully stimulating. Get her to come over while my old friend Robert Finch is here, and I'll put her on to saving his soul. *It will be as good as a rat-hunt!*' This will show you, my dear Theresa, how utterly absurd, and also how wickedly malicious, is the story to which you must have listened, I am sure with pain if not with incredulity. I will tell you more when we meet. In the meantime do, I beg you, contradict any slanderous stories about Durrige, and quote me as freely as you like for your authority. I give you leave to say that I will confront anyone on my return to London who is spreading this tissue of abominable lies. What a wicked world it is! I remember hearing the Duchess of Cleveland say, years ago, that civilisation has not conquered cruelty, but only changed its character. How true that is!

"Your affectionate old friend,

"ROBERT G. FINCH.

"P.S.—We drank '34 port after dinner last night, and to-day at luncheon I was persuaded to try Herbert's new brew of ale. He has made additions to the old brewhouse, and is supplying his ale at a low figure to all the ale-houses on the estate. What lies people will tell!"

To this letter he received no answer, but as soon as he was back in London, and well settled into his comfortable little house in Charles Street, to which Isabel had now contributed two very beautiful Chelsea figures from her collection at DurrIDGE, he ordered his brougham and drove round to Wilton Crescent.

The door was opened to him on this occasion by an elderly and sanctimonious-looking parlourmaid, who appeared to be disdainful of her present employer, and not at all satisfied with the character of the people who visited the house. She regarded Mr. Finch with a look which seemed to imply that he was a lost soul and a social pariah. To his inquiry if Lady Theresa was at home she returned no answer, but by a slight movement aside from the doorway conveyed the impression that he might come in if he was so abandoned as to wish to do so. She made no effort to take his hat and stick, nor to help the old gentleman out of his blue Melton overcoat, with its carefully brushed velvet collar. Indeed, she seemed to regard all his movements and all his actions in the hall as things to be carefully observed, and possibly used against him as evidence in the law-courts. She went up the twisting stairs as if the claret-coloured carpet polluted her feet, and at the door of the drawing-room, with her fingers on the handle, merely turned and looked at him, thus indicating a demand for his name.

"Mr. Robert Finch," puffed the disconcerted old gentleman, and pulled down his coat by the lapels, working his neck in his collar.

The forbidding maid opened the door, went in before him, and announced in a lachrymose tone of voice, "Mr. Finch, madam." She then fixed her eyes on the entering visitor as much as to say, "*Finch*, indeed! More like *Vulture*! As if you could deceive me, you wicked old sinner!" Then she went out, and shut the door so noiselessly that Mr. Finch had the uncomfortable feeling for several minutes that he was still under her observation.

After some inquiries about Theresa's health, and after he had taken up a seat by the fire, which was burning sulkily, and had apparently been lighted only a few minutes before his arrival, he said, "I hope Rivers is not ill?"

"I hope he's dead," was Lady Theresa's rejoinder. "I discharged him a month ago. He was a liar, a drunkard, a thief, and I've no doubt a good many other unpleasant things as well. In any case, he drank my whiskey and robbed me right and left."

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Finch. "How very sad."

"It doesn't trouble me in the least," answered Lady Theresa. "I never allow servants to worry me. If they suit me they can stay. If they don't, they go. Well, how are you? You look very well. I suppose you've been seeing a lot of people?"

For some minutes, as if they both wished to avoid the subject of DurrIDGE, Mr. Finch spoke of his visits to various great houses in the country, and Lady Theresa asked questions about the people who were there. At last Mr. Finch, who had been gradually edging his chair nearer and nearer to the sulky fire, wishing that his hostess felt the cold as sharply as he did, reminded her that he had been to DurrIDGE.

"I remember," she said. "You wrote me a ridiculous letter from there—full of sentiment, of course, and even a little moralising. My dear Robert, the blue-stocking twisted you round her little finger. I never knew a man so easily taken in by a woman. But that was always your *métier*."

"You are entirely mistaken, Theresa."

"Do you suppose she would show her hand while you were there, and while there were other guests in the castle?"

"But dear old George told me himself——"

"With his disease he can be made to say anything one chooses to tell him. He is not responsible for his words. That girl has intimidated him. He dare not call his soul his own."

"Upon my word, Theresa, you make me out a perfect fool."

"So you are where women are concerned."

"But women are not concerned in this case."

"That little blue-stocking is a veritable Becky Sharp. She has wiles and tricks for all sorts and conditions of men. She can make Hawthorpe run after her, can keep Aylmer Montgomery at her apron-strings, can rob George of all his will-power, and can make you her toady and trumpeter in London. Ah, you can't deceive me, Robert. She's as clever as they make 'em. Even her own mother doesn't know what is going on, and if ever there was a spy or an eavesdropper it's that hateful old woman at Cumberland. Tell me this. Why has Herbert joined the Yeomanry? You know how he hated taking any public part in the national life. You know how determined he was to live like a bucolic farmer at DurrIDGE. Why does the happy bridegroom leave his wife a few months after marriage and become a soldier? Why? I'll tell you. She has made a cuckold of him. Oh, no; it's no

use for you to raise your eyebrows and fling out your hands. I know. She has made a cuckold of him."

Mr. Finch looked at the great white face of his hostess, so like the enamel face of an inferior grandfather clock, and wondered how on earth she managed to keep so calm and cool during a tirade which would have made any virago of the working classes purple in the face and altogether breathless.

"Will you listen to me," he said calmly and reproachfully, "while I give you a true account of life at Durridge?"

"If you do not mind me laughing occasionally."

"Theresa, I assure you it is a very long time," said Mr. Finch, turning full round from the fire to look at her, and at last sitting back in his chair, "since I stayed in a house where life was anything like so beautiful, so tranquil, and so profoundly happy."

"All put on for your benefit!"

"It reminded me of the houses I used to stay at years ago. It was like Trentham, like Compton Verney, like Eaton, like Highclere, like Buckhurst, like Maiden Bradley, like Longleat, like your mother's own house. Ah, where shall we look for such homes at the present time?"

"They were tiresome to a degree. Nothing but meals and prayers. Odious—quite odious."

Mr. Finch shook his head. "There was a dignity about those great houses, Theresa, a dignity and a spaciousness which gave a beauty to human life and a real glory to the human spirit. There was peace in those great houses——"

"Monotony—tedious monotony."

"No; serenity. There was a great serenity in those splendid houses, and without serenity there can be no refinement of mind, no kindness of heart. That is what I miss in the world to-day, Theresa—refinement and kindness of heart. They go together. Refinement and kindness of heart. Where do you find them at the present time? I found them, thank God, at Durridge. Yes, I did, Theresa. And if I look well, as you say I do, it is because Durridge revived the sweetest memories of my life. I came away feeling twenty years younger. I declare I did."

"Robert, you make me sick with your sentiment. Please ring the bell and we'll have some tea."

He got up from his chair with difficulty and rang the bell. "I am glad it is tea this time, Theresa. Last time, I remember, it was whiskey."

"What an inconvenient habit you have of always bringing

up the past ! My whiskey bill frightened me back to tea. I dislike it, but it's economical."

"Would you mind if I poked the fire?"

"Good heavens, you are surely not cold? Why, this room is like a hot-house. But poke it by all means if you like, or perhaps you had better wait till Simpson brings the tea. She understands the fire."

"Hullo, Theresa!" exclaimed Mr. Finch from the mantel-piece, with a suddenness and a seriousness which very nearly made the old lady jump for the first time in her life. "Why, what has become of your Dr. Wall—those two powder-blue vases?"

"Oh, I've put them away. You were always hinting for them, so I had them removed on purpose, to prevent you from breaking at least one clause in the tenth commandment. Ah, here comes tea."

"I hope they're safe," sighed Mr. Finch. "I miss them. They are very beautiful, Theresa, and they ought to be seen."

"Poke the fire, Simpson. Mr. Finch seems to think that the room is cold."

Among his passions for rightness, Mr. Finch included a passion for the purest and most delicate tea. He could not bear to see a woman splashing a cataract of tea-leaves into a cup which contained no milk and with his fingers he would break a lump of sugar in half if he could not find in the bowl a piece which was not too large to destroy the tea's flavour by over sweetness. He was particular in these things, and he held that it was only by being particular about such things that delicate life could hope to rescue itself from the clutches of savagery.

On the present occasion he drank a cup of tea which was obviously of the cheapest kind, coarse, harsh, and with no other flavour than its repellent strength. The bread-and-butter was frankly disgusting—the bread spongy, the butter yellow and rancid. There was no dish of neat little buttered scones; but on a plate, badly arranged, were a handful of inferior cakes which were stale, and had been taken, evidently, from a tin in the larder.

Thus depressed—for he only flowered in the sunshine of perfect rightness—Mr. Finch delivered his narrative of Durridge Castle.

It was a charming tale, truly something of an idyll, and in spite of his depression Mr. Finch told it so well that even the cynical scepticism of Lady Theresa was occasionally shaken.

Indeed, there were moments when Mr. Finch saw in her eyes a look which suggested to him that she was remembering her own married life. For she had once been extremely happy, and had loved her garden and her children, and had looked after a charming old father in something of the same way that Isabel was now looking after the duke. But she kept saying, "How they have deceived you!" and, "As if that sort of thing would last!" and "My story is a very different one!"

At the end of his narrative she challenged him definitely on one point. "Can you explain to me, Robert," she demanded, "how it is that a young man so retiring, so inarticulate, so boorish, so afraid to say 'Bo' to a goose, has suddenly joined the Yeomanry?"

"Yes. I had it from Hawthorpe himself."

"Hawthorpe?" She was alert in a moment.

"Yes."

"He was there, then?" she demanded.

"Yes, he arrived while I was there."

Lady Theresa laughed with the utmost satisfaction. "There you are! What did I tell you? Oh, Robert, Robert, what a fool they have made of you! If you had waited till he had gone you would have seen the arrival of Aylmer Montgomery. Of course you would! Oh, it's as good as a play."

Before he could say another word Simpson opened the door and announced a Mrs. and Miss Kopstein. Mr. Finch, startled by such a name, looked round to see a stout little Jewish woman, who tinkled and rustled as she walked, entering the room, followed by a lean and yellow-looking daughter, who was nervously endeavouring to cultivate a languid air. He was amazed. He was even more amazed still when the older woman greeted Lady Theresa with the effusiveness of an intimate friendship.

"I've come to tell you, dear Lady Theresa," she said, in a rich and cooing deep voice, smiling and twinkling all the time, "that I have at last succeeded in persuading my husband to take Sir Anthony Holton's house for three years. Isn't it lovely? Now you really must promise to come and stay with us. You said you would, and I never should have taken the house if I hadn't believed you."

IV

FROM the beginning of her married life Isabel rose with the lark, and, unsupported by early morning tea, joined Herbert in the garden, where he would be waiting for her with his dogs, impatient as they to be off on the day's business.

It was always a beautiful experience to Isabel to come out into this early world, when only the battlements and the topmost windows of the sleeping castle were on fire with the rising sun, and all the lower part of the immense and ancient fabric, with its lichens and moss, its carved arms over the door and its wide-sweeping stairs guarded by the Stretton lions, was dark, dew-stained, and cold. She loved the almost sacred stillness of the earth, the deep sense of sweet freshness in the cheerful air, the cool sight of thick, clustering dew on the smooth lawns, the feeling of going forward out of shadow and cold into sunlight and warmth.

Although on these occasions Herbert's talk was generally of the matter in hand, he, too, shared in Isabel's response to the loveliness of nature in her freshest hour. For he was still a boy in his feeling for the world about him, and, inarticulate as he might appear to other people, he rejoiced quietly in his heart far more often than even Isabel suspected over the sights and sounds of the countryside. Beautiful great trees, their tops glittering wetly in the morning sun, the loud cawing of rooks, the dull tearing sound of cattle feeding in thick grass, a blackbird dropping suddenly and noisily out of a drenched bush burning with fire at every point, a Clydesdale mare stumblingly, threateningly, and with angry snorts, approaching his dogs, a lark singing in the blue of heaven, a kingfisher flashing along an olive-green reach of the tree-shaded and rock-broken river, a stag leaping up from the bracken, sea-gulls wheeling with harsh cries over a piece of plough, the deep calling of sheep from invisible heights in the awaking world about him—these things, and a score of others, ministered to his sense of well-being, and zested the vigorous pleasure of his walk with an emotion as old and satisfying as his earliest memories.

It did not greatly worry either Isabel or Herbert when rain was falling from a grey sky, and a strong wind blew across a sullen land, mourning for the sun. To be well soaked with rain, and to fight against the opposition of a genuine northern tempest, seemed to them a part of life's natural business, and a part of man's natural fun. The sound of the great wind

drinking up the music of enormous trees, and bending lesser trees like reeds in the river-bed, filled Isabel's heart with a kind of exultation, and his with a calm animal satisfaction. Often, when it was impossible to speak, and when they would be staggering forward with bent heads, Isabel hanging to his arm for support, they would look at each other, smile as if at a joke, and signal with their eyes that it was good to be out in such a hurry.

Often they would arrange to ride before breakfast to some distant part of the estate, but now riding was forbidden to Isabel, and if business carried Herbert to a point too distant for walking he would drive her in a dog-cart, or in a phaeton with two horses, telling her as they went along what was in his mind about this and that matter of his government. In this way Isabel soon formed a useful knowledge of the work that was going on at various points of the estate, and was able after breakfast to devote the remainder of the day to the duke, her studies, and her household.

She had formed the habit of reading to the duke for several hours during the day. He loved memoirs more than any other form of literature, but also essays and history. Isabel would read to him books which he had read before—some of them several times before—such as Lord Hervey's memoirs of George the Second, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters, Evelyn, Nollekens, the Croker papers, Lady Theresa Lewis's extracts from the writings of Mary Berry, Crabb Robinson, Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, Dr. Johnson, Horace Walpole, Addison. Often he would interrupt her reading to tell her something that he knew of the people they came across in these old pages, and then a discussion would arise in which the duke would play the part of a tutor and she that of a student. Very often, because he was a bad sleeper, they would read and discuss far into the night, long after all the others were asleep. Often Isabel would leave him on the big four-poster bed and go candle in hand to her room when it was past one in the morning.

She was supremely happy, because she was conscious of a real enlargement of understanding. The duke had told her one day, after he had explained to her how it was an imperfection in its manufacture which gave to Waterford glass—"Munster glass," he called it—its superiority over all English glass, that Michael Angelo chose for his epitaph the words "*Ancora imparo*"—"Always learning"—which showed that, besides being a very great man, he was also a very wise man.

"We are only bored, my dear," he had told her, "when we are incapable of learning anything fresh. Stupid people think that what they want in order to be happy is a fresh incident in their lives; like children reading a fairy-story, they are always wanting something to happen. But the only freshness which keeps the mind young is fresh knowledge. I am glad you have discovered that secret. If I may advise you, never think you have exhausted any single subject. Always want to know more. I daresay you know that a foreign ambassador said of Lord Chatham that no one could come out from his closet without feeling a braver man. That was high praise. Higher praise, I think, would be to say of a man that one could not come away from talking to him without *being* a wiser man."

Isabel had become profoundly interested in all forms of craftsmanship, from architecture and the art of the great cabinet-makers of the eighteenth century down to gardening and needlework. She had discovered engrossing books in the library which told her the history of these things, and from Mr. Finch she had learned of more modern books which carried that history down to present times.

There was not a room in the great castle which she had not examined with a desire to test her book knowledge, and not a cabinet whose contents she had not inspected with the eye of a student. One of her pleasures was to push the wheel-chair of the duke before a cabinet filled with china or glass, and, taking out the pieces one by one and placing them on his tray, listen while he explained to her how she might know the place of their origin, the date of their manufacture, and their association with the history of civilisation. It was the same with chairs and tables, the same with paintings and prints, the same with carpets and hangings. The castle was a treasure-house, and she so loved its treasures that merely by studying them she became extremely well versed in the knowledge of a collector, and never had a dull moment in her day.

To this side of her nature Herbert Stretton could not minister. He was entirely without any feeling in these regions. To him a chair was a chair, a Chelsea figure not to be distinguished from a Staffordshire figure, a picture by Romney very like a picture by Sir Francis Grant, and ancient glass a fidgety matter, not to be bothered about at all. He smiled at his wife's enthusiasms in these matters, and while she talked to the duke about them would read the *Field* and

smoke his pipe, often yawning a good deal, for he was tired out with his exercise in the open air.

There was another subject of high interest to his wife on which Herbert was silent. The duke had made her something more than a little sceptical about her mother's political and religious opinions. Aylmer Montgomery, who loved talking to her because she was so sympathetic a listener, swayed her on occasion towards the high and lofty Liberalism which he had imbibed from Matthew Arnold, making her read *Literature and Dogma*, *Culture and Anarchy*, and *Friendship's Garland*; but Lord Hawthorpe, coming up to the castle from the Midlands to help Herbert with his kennels, but also to help himself with gun and rod to Herbert's grouse, partridges, pheasants, brown trout, and salmon, would talk very intimately to Isabel of his own passionate intellectual ideals, which were entirely Conservative. He made her feel that she would accept everything in Church and State because in everything England was perfect, sacred, and most beautiful, and because, perhaps, Lord Hawthorpe was to her one of the most gallant men that ever breathed English air.

Herbert's opinions on these important subjects, whenever he could be induced to utter them, had one invariable quality which it was impossible for Isabel to overlook—these opinions of his never seemed to matter. If challenged by the others to say what he thought of any particular point in dispute, Herbert would deliver judgment in so laborious and crude a manner that it was impossible to resist a smile, and after a few moments of good-natured chaff he would drop out of the conversation.

"I am glad," Hawthorpe once said to Isabel, "that you are cultivating a knowledge of the arts, for Herbert is never likely to maintain the traditions of DurrIDGE in that sphere. He's a thoroughly good fellow, but he is not yet, if you'll allow me to say so, properly awake. Do you know what I mean?"

Isabel had never discussed her husband with anyone, and she was nervous and uncomfortable at thus finding herself suddenly called upon to accept what was surely a criticism of his intelligence. "I am afraid," she replied, "that I shall never know as much about the indoor arts as Herbert knows about the outdoor arts. He is always astonishing me by his knowledge. Have you ever noticed how fond all animals are of him, particularly dogs? He has the most extraordinary power over them."

She loved Herbert for his obvious good qualities, and she

had no wish in the world—for she herself had a very great respect for restraint, and a fairly strong contempt for all forms of excess—that he should be a whit more demonstrative in his tenderness towards her ; that did not weigh with her in the least ; but there were certainly moments when she wished that his intellect was quicker, keener, and more sensitive in those regions where she felt her own mind was most naturally and most happily expanding.

One day, when they were looking at the great book of Piranesi, which so strongly influenced Robert Adam's mind, Hawthorne said to her, "From an architectural point of view old Herbert is pure Adam, but I will not have it that you are so primitive as Eve ; you are later ; I should call you absolute Venus." But this was said so openly and laughingly that Isabel could smile at his jest, and feel no offence in his compliment. It never occurred to her, however much she might be aware of Herbert's shortcomings, to doubt that he was a man most worthy of her love.

As for Herbert, if he had ever attempted the impossible task of analysing his feelings towards Isabel, what would have been the judgment of his soul ? He seemed to accept her exactly as he accepted his duties towards Durridge, and to love her in very much the same manner as he loved Durridge.

He admired her intellect. He was satisfied by her character. It never entered his mind to think of her with any degree of criticism. She was the one person in the world whom he could conceive of as his wife ; but he was almost as completely happy during the busy hours of the day with his keepers, his stud-groom, his bailiff, and his wood-reeve as he was with Isabel in the early hours of the dawn.

Herbert Stretton was one of those men who can find a complete satisfaction in the companionship of a dog. He loved all animals, but dogs more than any other creatures. He could watch a dog play for many minutes, and watch a dog work for hours. He had a deep admiration for their intelligence, and often wondered what it was in a dog that made it prefer a man's friendship to the companionship of another dog. He did not often fondle his dogs, and never allowed them to jump into his lap ; but he would frequently look at them with a grave affection in his eyes, and very often talk to them when he was alone with them. For example, coming to the end of a letter he was writing, he would say, without looking up from the table, "Well, old man, I think we'll go down to the river and see if we can

catch a trout," or "I think we'll go and take a look at what the carpenters are doing," and the dog, lying at full length on the floor, would immediately begin, without lifting its head or changing its attitude, to wag its tail. A retriever of which he was particularly fond knew his habits so well that without a word from him it would be aware of his intention to go out before he had made a sign of changing his occupation; it would get up, wag its tail, and go to the door, standing there with its head raised, as if waiting for his fingers to turn the handle.

For horses Herbert Stretton had none of Lord Hawthorpe's extravagant passion. He loved riding, but was not a perfect rider; he liked driving, but was not a perfect coachman; some imperfection of sympathy seemed to interfere between him and horses. All the same, he was a fairly good trainer of a horse, being very patient and quiet in handling a young thing, and he certainly found a good deal of his pleasure in the breeding of horses—horses of all kinds. But he averred that no horse ever had the character of a dog, and that as for affection, compared with a dog a horse did not know the meaning of the word.

He had a great delight in all young things—not only puppies, but pigs, foals, calves, lambs, chickens, ducklings, and kittens; and for hours he could amuse himself, just like a boy, in watching these creatures make their first steps in the art of existence. Furthermore, he was as well acquainted as any keeper with the habits of wild animals and wild birds, and never took a walk without finding a score of incidents which set him thinking in the channel most natural for his thoughts.

Occupied from morning to night in matters that engrossed him, living in a place as dear to him as life itself, Herbert Stretton questioned nothing in existence—certainly not his wife—and was as grateful to a Providence he did not profess to understand as he was friendly to a human race which he felt was sufferable enough in small doses, and quite lovable in individual instances.

V

THE day had come, eagerly and long expected, when Mrs. Townley received her summons to DurrIDGE. She had time, nevertheless, after ringing the bell to order a carriage, to

glance through some of her other letters on the breakfast-table, and, looking up from one of these numerous letters, she exclaimed to her husband, who was still thinking of Isabel :

" Sir Anthony Holton has let his house for three years."

" I don't wonder," said the old ironmaster.

" To some people named Kopstein."

" Ah, Jews !"

" He wants me to call upon them."

" Hum !"

Mrs. Townley dropped the letter and picked up another. Her husband continued to think chiefly of Isabel, but also of Sir Anthony Holton.

She was leaving the room to prepare for her visit to the castle when Mr. Townley turned round in his chair and said to her : " There are some Jews who are excellent people. I have a respect for their honesty, their generosity, and their enterprise. But there are other Jews of whom one has to be very careful, and I should think that Sir Anthony's friends would be likely to be of that category."

She said, " Well, I can't stop now," and opened the door.

" Be careful, my dear ; that's all," he called to her, and turned to his plate.

He would have liked to go with his wife to DurrIDGE, for he was in deep anxiety about Isabel ; but ever since her marriage he had felt that to exercise his privilege as her father, or to indulge his affection for a very dear daughter, might appear in the duke's eyes as an attempt on his part to establish certain social claims, which was so hateful an idea to his mind that, rather than run such a risk, he preferred to suffer the deprivation of very seldom seeing his favourite child.

Mrs. Townley knew how deeply he was anxious about Isabel at this time, and, kissing him on both cheeks before she went to the carriage, in which Roscoe was already seated, told him in her brisk and cheerful manner that she was quite certain all would go well, that she would telegraph directly the event was over, and that she would certainly be back in a week's time.

The old ironmaster did not go to his works on this important day. He stayed at home, and began his vigil by reading the papers. A political crisis was at hand. Gladstone had made an important speech ; the Lords had ruined his Employers' Liability Bill and his Local Government Bill ; this contemptuous treatment of his measures, after the rejection of his Home Rule Bill, was too much for the octogenarian Prime

Minister; the Lords were warned. Mr. Townley read this speech. In spite of his wife's views he had a feeling of sympathy for "the Grand Old Man." He wondered if there would be a general election.

While he was thus killing time at home, and while Mrs. Townley was driving to Durridge, talking hard to Roscoe about her own experiences of childbirth, and expressing the hope again and again that Isabel's first child would be a son, Isabel, with the doctor and two nurses in the room, lay on her bed in a state of great pain. Herbert was standing at the window of his room in the turret, seeing nothing of the world outside; the old duke, in his wheel-chair before a fire in the library, suffered in his mind a pain as great as Isabel was suffering in her body.

He loved Isabel as much as he had ever loved any creature in the world. In his old eyes she was completely a child—as fresh, as fair, as sweet, as innocent, as a girl just entering her teens; and it seemed to him a most monstrous and dreadful thing that this little girl of his, this mere child, should be called upon to confront the risk of childbirth and to endure its hideous pains.

As the slow-dragging hours of this poignant suspense lengthened, and lengthened ominously, his head nodded on his breast, his shoulders came forward, and tears trickled down his cheeks. He felt himself quite unable to sit back in his chair, to endure the effort of holding himself up. He lolled forward, as he had lolled more than ninety years before over the bar of the high chair still in the nursery, like a mere bundle of clothes, and gaped into the flames of the fire, moaning from time to time like an animal in its sleep, his mouth shaking, his chin loose.

For three weeks this dread had been upon his mind, weakening his strength, and now the day of crisis found him in a condition of great and dangerous feebleness. The doctor, in coming to see him on his arrival at the castle that morning, had been struck by the visible change in his appearance; and old Soulsby had said to the housekeeper more than once, "His Grace is breaking up. This child will be the death of him." The great strength of will which had kept his terrible disease at arm's length for so many years, to the wonder of all his doctors, now seemed suddenly to have given way. He had been unable to sleep at night for three weeks. The very lightest food upset him. His mind occasionally wandered, and often his speech was difficult to understand.

But on Mrs. Townley's entrance into the library he made an effort to sit upright, and an effort to greet her with something of his old cheerfulness.

"Ah, here's our proselytiser!" he mumbled, attempting to wag his head. "Well, I knew you would be one of the first to fuss over this business. Have a glass of sherry. Ring the bell for Soulsby. Very good thing after a long drive, brown sherry, colour of walnut."

She said to him, cheerful and radiant, "Now I'm not going to stay down here with you to be teased. I'm going straight up to my darling Isabel. I only just looked in to tell you I had come."

She was shocked to her heart by his appearance, and stood over him for some moments, loath to leave him with any suddenness.

After mumbling to himself for a little while, wagging his head and fidgeting with his hands, he suddenly looked up to her, for the first time in his life hungrily and pleadingly, and asked her: "You think it will be all right, don't you?"

"Of course it will be all right!" she returned, fighting back a sob in her throat. She bent down to him, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Why, good gracious me," she exclaimed, as it were reprovingly, "a perfectly healthy young woman like Isabel, who has done everything I told her, and who has had all the care and attention in the world—why, of course it is going to be all right!"

But this assurance, far from satisfying the old man, seemed greatly to displease him. "I do wish," he complained, "you wouldn't be so knock-you-down in your opinions." The hand resting on his shoulder was conscious of a faint impatient effort on his part to shake it off.

"Don't be anxious, dear duke," she said gently; "I really am quite sure that our darling will soon—quite soon—be one of the happiest women in the world."

"Well, all I can say is," said the duke, "I hope it's a boy. A girl wouldn't be worth all this *tracasserie*, all this fuss you're making about it."

"Of course it will be a boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Townley.

"There you go again!" he complained. "I do wish you wouldn't be so certain about important things."

She laughed soothingly. "Ah, well, you shall see. Now I must go upstairs. But soon I shall come back to you with the good news. *Au revoir*, dear duke!"

"Soon!" he muttered to himself. "I never knew such a

woman—stop a minute, though, I forgot Theresa. She's another dogmatist." But Mrs. Townley heard nothing of these mumblings.

The door of the library had opened very noiselessly, and Mrs. Boiston, the housekeeper, was making signs for her to come at once.

VI

WHEN Mrs. Townley returned to the library half an hour later she was stricken with a moment's terror, believing the duke to be dead. He had fallen so far forward in his chair that his head actually rested on the tray, and certainly there was no visible sign in the collapsed body and the pathetically humped shoulders that he still breathed.

Mistress of herself as she habitually was, Mrs. Townley on this occasion gave way to panic. "Duke!" she cried, in a loud voice of horror and pain, and straightway hurried up the long room, her head swimming, her hands extended in front of her.

A movement on his part, however, faint as it was, enabled Mrs. Townley to compose her startled spirit just before she came level with his chair.

"Good news, dear duke! What did I tell you? It's all over. Our darling is safe."

He made no answer. He was so crouched up that she could not see his face. A slight sideways movement of his head alone told her that he was listening.

"Herbert would have come to you," she continued, "but he is waiting to go into her room. She has asked for him several times."

Still no answer.

"Oh, duke, she was so splendid, so brave. How proud I was of our darling! She suffered. The doctor was very anxious when I first went up. He even thought that he would be obliged to use instruments. Thank God, it wasn't necessary. And the child is as splendid as any mother could desire. So we must all be very grateful."

The head came round a little more. "And it's all over? She's out of danger?"

For a moment she hesitated.

"What did you say?" he demanded, in a stronger voice.

"Yes, duke, she's out of danger. It's all safely over."

"And it's a boy?"

"No, duke, it's a darling little girl."

"Oh, it's a little girl. Ha! You were too dogmatic, were you not? Have the goodness to ring the bell."

When she had done as he wished she said to him, "I will go upstairs now, and send Herbert down to you as soon as ever he leaves Isabel."

"Won't you stay," he asked, "to drink the newcomer's health?"

She laughed. "I know a better way," she replied, "of serving its best interests."

"You've seen the newspaper, I suppose. That old rascal Gladstone has started now to threaten the House of Lords. I knew he'd come to that in the long run."

"Dreadful old man!" said Mrs. Townley as she went to the door.

Soulsby, who had felt the crisis as much as anyone, and who had just announced the news to Catchside the gardener and Garvie the head keeper, came breathlessly into the library.

"Open a bottle of champagne, Soulsby. Bollinger 1880," said the duke.

"Yes, your Grace."

"Mr. Herbert will be down in a moment."

"Yes, your Grace."

"Bring three glasses. The doctor will be down soon."

"Yes, your Grace."

"And bring a glass for yourself."

"Thank you, your Grace."

"It's a pity, Soulsby, it's not a boy."

"We must be thankful, your Grace, it's anything at all. Mrs. Herbert has had a terrible time. I am afraid she has suffered something dreadful."

"Don't fuss, Soulsby, don't fuss. It's a canny bairn, according to Mrs. Townley."

Soulsby was much struck by the duke's use of the local dialect, and reported it elsewhere. Before nightfall the whole estate was talking of the "canny bairn" up at the castle.

The doctor was the first to come downstairs. Herbert, pale and shaken, arrived five minutes afterwards. The gravity of these two men seemed to irritate the duke. "Such a fuss hasn't been made in this castle," he said, "for nearly fifty years. All about a little girl, too. If it had been a boy I'd try to find excuses for you. Give me the wine, Soulsby. I'll drink to the babe in spite of its gender. Charge your glasses!"

Soulsby held a glass to the duke's lips, for he was now

unable to use his hands at all, and the old man stooped forward to drink. "One moment," he said, as they watched him, his lips at the rim of the glass. "God bless the bairn's mother."

His head seemed to give way at the neck. He struck the glass with his forehead, spilling the wine all over the tray, and as Herbert and the doctor stepped forward to his assistance they heard him very faintly—almost, as it were, in a whisper—crying and laughing at the same time.

That night, while Isabel was feeding the "canny bairn" at her breast for the first time, the old duke, quietly and without a stir of his body, breathed out his soul on the huge four-poster bed, which she had once felt was like a monument in a church. Herbert was alone in the room, sitting by the fire, thinking of Isabel. He remained in this posture long after the duke was dead. No sign was given by this old man, whose memories stretched back to the days of George the Third, that he had done with the life of the human race. Without even a sigh of farewell he slipped away from a world which he had once loved well enough, but had long since ceased to understand, and it was more than an hour after his death that Herbert, going softly to the bedside to discover if the duke were asleep, discovered with a suddenness which seemed almost to stop his heart, that he would never wake again.

It was a night of extraordinary stillness, when fires burn with a sharp brightness and the smallest sound is heard with an individual distinctness. Next morning the inmates of the castle awoke to find the country deep under snow.

VII

THE death of the Duke of Rothbury set many pens at work up and down the country. Gentlemen whose duty it is to comment at short notice on the events of contemporary history, and whose genius lies in having at their command a dignified style of writing, an omniscient air, and a quite admirable sensitiveness to the interests of the political party represented by their particular newspapers, found themselves on this occasion considering the death of an old duke with a somewhat unusual anxiety. They saw the dead body, as it were, in the light of an approaching general election.

"I want you," said the spectacled and pinched-faced editor of a Liberal newspaper, "to lay particular emphasis on the fact that the duke opposed electoral reform and never forgave Sir Robert Peel for the repeal of the Corn Laws. As delicately

as possible, making use of the rapier rather than the cudgel—for we are dealing with the death of a charming old gentleman—exhibit him as the veritable Tory, who wishes nothing to be changed in a world which is exceedingly comfortable for himself, and who cannot conceive how anybody outside his own class is so presumptuous as to think of attempting to govern the country. Poke fun, but with extremest delicacy—your touch cannot be too fine—at the preposterous notions of this silly old man. Hold him up as a representative of the unrepentant Toryism which has been mutilating Liberal measures in the House of Lords, and is now using Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule policy to capture, for reaction and the 'governing classes,' a new lease of power."

"I observe," said the leader-writer, "that the duke played a rather prominent part in helping Lord Shaftesbury to pass his Factory Acts. Would you like me——"

"No; I think not. A better course would be to praise him, but with a little measure of irony, for his antagonism to Dizzy. You might say that he was not altogether wanting in perspicuity, for when a number of Tories were running after, and prostrating themselves before, an adventurous Hebrew with a rather shallow gift for florid epigram, the duke insisted that the heaven-sent genius was a charlatan, and never tired of denouncing him as a traitor to Protection and a secret enemy of the governing classes. But all this, my dear Butler, with as light and airy a touch as possible. The wreath we must lay upon the old gentleman's grave should be composed of nothing so solemn as madonna lilies, and nothing so sweet as violets. Pansies, I think, are the flowers for us. Charming things, but a little amusing if one examines them closely: thoughts—a wreath of thoughts—but thoughts smiling with a playful irony."

In the offices of a great Conservative newspaper the editor, a burly man with a farmer's beard and a scholar's eye, addressed himself nervously, almost shyly, to a leader-writer whose knowledge of agriculture, if not profound, was at least safe enough to avoid those preposterous mistakes of journalism which bring the blood of country gentlemen to their faces, and make ploughboys, when they hear of them, grin from ear to ear.

"Old Rothbury is dead," said the editor. "Couldn't have gone at a more awkward time." He scratched his wiry beard, and twitched his mouth. "Radicals will use him for all they're worth. Think we had better avoid his political eccentricities. Fine old fellow, I suppose, as a landowner."

Did his duty. Lived on his estate. Bred good cattle, and all that sort of thing."

"There's the picturesque side of him, too," put in the leader-writer, sucking at his pipe.

"What's that?"

"Godchild of George the Third, friend of Wellington, knew Lady Blessington——"

"Ah, yes; people like Lady Blessington; put her in; very good, excellent—but, but——"

"Yes, there was a whisper of scandal."

"Better leave her out. What about the Church? Did he do anything picturesque in that way?"

"I think it would be laying an undue strain on the foundations of the Establishment to say that he was one of its pillars."

"He backed Shaftesbury, didn't he?" inquired the editor.

"Yes."

"Ah, that is a very useful point. The great country gentleman has always been a disinterested friend of the people. We might emphasise the point that Shaftesbury was opposed by Bright and Gladstone."

"And by the whole of the manufacturing interests. He said that he got more support from the man of the world than from the religious Radicals."

"Um! Um! We must be careful there. We've collared most of the manufacturers now. The big fish are on our side. They've learned wisdom. The Radicals have only got the petty tradesmen. No, I should leave that out."

"All right."

"Treat him chiefly as a great landowner who lived on his estate, eh? Improved the breed of cattle. Famous for his Clydesdales. Looked after his people. Much beloved. Never took a real interest in politics. Friend of Wellington. Friend of Shaftesbury. Knew most of the great people——"

"He knew Thackeray, and Michael Faraday."

"Of course he did; excellent. I see you've got my idea. I'm sure you'll do it very well. Picturesque and kindly; that's what we want. I think you may be able to find one or two anecdotes. Widgery might help you there. Awkward time for the old fellow to die. Honest, but too rigid. Morbid about consistency. Personally, I think he was very nearly right, but his opposition to Dizzy was—was—oh, very impolitic. Nice old fellow, I believe; only saw him once; not much to look at; little bit of a chap, but the right marks—oh, yes, the right marks."

In a daze which had lasted for two days, Herbert, summoned by Soulsby, walked from his room in the turret, unconscious that his retriever had followed him, to the death-chamber of the duke.

For a moment he had the feeling that he should knock at the door, that it would somehow or another be wanting in respect merely to turn the handle of that silent room, and walk in with no outward form of humility and reverence. Even when he realised that he need not knock, he felt that he must turn the handle with great gentleness, and open the door with a deliberate slowness.

A whine from his dog, because Soulsby had put a hand on its collar, caused him to turn round.

"Take him back to my room," he said huskily. It was some hours since he had spoken.

Soulsby went away, stooping down to keep his hand on the collar of the reluctant dog, and Herbert turned the handle of the dead duke's door and entered the dark-curtained room.

The coffin stood where the couch had always been, at the foot of the great four-poster bed, but it was not dwarfed by the bed; on the contrary, it had a look of eminence, and was conspicuous to such a degree that it seemed the only living thing in the room. Candles in tall silver sticks were burning at its head and at its foot. Between the candles at its head someone had placed a crucifix, and at the pedestal of the crucifix was a Bible. All about the dead man, at his head, at his feet, and on both sides of him, were many flowers, banked up around the exalted coffin, over the end of which was suspended the duke's blue ribbon of the Garter.

A deep scent of violets hung in the still room, and the stillness was as heavy as the scent.

Herbert, having noiselessly closed the door behind him, walked slowly through this sweet scent and this deep stillness towards the coffin. He held his head up; his hands were motionless at his sides. He was conscious of the loftiness of the room and of the brightness of the candles. He stopped midway between the head and the foot of the raised coffin and directed his eyes to the face of the dead man. A sense of great coldness suddenly took possession of him, as if he were in the neighbourhood of ice. His heart began to beat with a strange rapidity. Before he could master himself his eyes were filled with tears, and a groan of pain came to his lips.

There lay the man to whom he had listened more than to any other in the world, and on those lips, only the other day so

playful and mocking, was now a silence that forbade him to come near. The closed eyes also seemed coldly and awfully to resent intrusion. The whole aspect of the face suggested a proud wonder that he should presume to approach and spy upon so intimate and sacred a sleep. The dignity of death in this case was the dignity of a high and solemn aloofness, which made Herbert feel himself, not merely an intruder, but a stranger.

He could not, however, draw back. Something in the lips held him there. He had always listened to the duke with such admiration, such reverence, such affection. The voice of the dead man was a more familiar memory in his soul than the eyes. Most of his opinions had been derived from those lips. How often he had watched them : how often he had listened to the words that came from them ! It seemed to him an overwhelming fact that this familiar voice would never sound again. The cold firmness of those lips, locked for ever, coldly, proudly, even majestically locked, as if they had put words away among the foolish things of childhood, gave Herbert a new thought about death—its silence, its awful silence. The words of Hamlet, "*The rest is silence*," floated into his consciousness, and he stood there, silent himself, but torn with thought, contemplating the unbroken and eternal silence of death in a daze of sadness that seemed to break his heart.

Slowly from his lips, and scarcely with any conscious volition of his mind, came the muttered, husky words, "Thank you for all your kindness to me." That was his farewell. He had taken his last look of the duke. Rather quickly he drew back from the coffin, walked to the fireplace, leant his arm on the high mantelshelf, his head on his arm, and stood there in dreadful tearless grief, thinking of his great love for the dead man, and of the bitter solitude in his heart now that the duke was silent for evermore.

A few minutes after Herbert had taken this last farewell of the dead, Twentyman, the undertaker, followed by one of his men, entered the room. Twentyman spent a great deal of his time, so he said, in cheering up his men, who otherwise would have broken down under the doleful character of their work. His face wore an habitual expression of forced cheerfulness ; a red nose, red spots on his cheeks, and large, watery eyes, suggested the make-up of a comedian whose long white countenance was fashioned by nature for melancholy. The man who followed him was little and brisk, with a sharp, pointed nose, sandy hair, and ferrety eyes.

"Well, Kyle," said Twentyman, when the last screw had been driven home, "his Grace lived to a fruity old age, and he done his duty as a gentleman and an Englishman."

"He stands," said Kyle, who was of the Wesleyan persuasion, putting away his tools, "at the judgment-seat of God. That's all we know about him, Mr. Twentyman. He stands at the judgment-seat of God."

"Where we shall all stand one day," said Twentyman, as cheerfully as he could manage.

"One thing more we know about him," said Kyle, with a determined nod of his head.

"What is that?" asked the undertaker.

Kyle straightened himself, got a good grip of his little box of tools, and made answer, "His opportunities for doing good were so great that whatever he may have done on the right side—and I'm not judging him; God forbid—he'll have a deal to answer for."

VIII

"I CANNOT understand," exclaimed Lady Theresa, "this behaviour of Herbert. It seems to me very absurd. He ought to be here with the rest of us, not moping upstairs in his own room."

Aylmer Montgomery, as no one else ventured to speak, replied gently that Herbert had been extremely fond of the duke, and certainly knew him far more intimately than anybody who had attended the funeral.

"I quite understand *that*," said Lady Theresa very impatiently, looking round almost contemptuously at the rest of the people in the library, most of them old people, with faces so sad that their black garments appeared to be quite unnecessary. "What I don't understand is his weakness in allowing grief to master him in this ridiculous fashion."

"Don't you think," asked Lord Hawthorpe, not without a smile, "it's rather refreshing to find real grief in the world?"

"Real grief," Lady Theresa answered, "never shows itself. What Herbert is suffering from now is not grief, but mawkishness. If he isn't careful, he'll be as bad as the Queen. A fine price the country has had to pay for her Majesty's sentimental widowhood. All this Radicalism is due to her sacrifice of her duties. Frogmore is bigger to her than England. She is trying, no doubt, to make up for it now. She sees her mistake. But it's too late. That horrid

old Gladstone retired from public life shaking his fist at the House of Lords. Would he have dared to do such a thing if we had had a real Court for the last thirty years? Of course not. Instead of a Court we've had the Albert Memorial, and the national consequence is Radicalism in every walk of life. Many of my most amusing friends are Radicals. They are Radicals because life is dull and pompous. They want things to happen. The Albert Memorial drives them wild. It's a dreadful thing, and ought to be blown up or interred at Frogmore. In ten years' time the Radicals won't be shaking their fists at the House of Lords; they'll be shaking them at the Throne."

Lord Hawthorpe listened to this tirade with a hard, almost a cruel, look on his old-fashioned face. When it was over he said rather sharply: "I think your ladyship falls into a common error."

"Oh, I hope it's not common!"

"You mistake London for England."

"Well, it's the only part of England worth living in."

"That depends upon one's idea of happiness, and also one's idea of duty. But I assure you London is not England. I assure you also that the Conservative party, which is loyal to the Throne, and devoted to its present august occupant, will sweep Radicalism clean out of Lancashire in a few weeks, and go up to Westminster with a majority over both the Liberals and their Irish allies."

Lady Theresa accepted this rebuke with a cold stare but with grateful words. "Then I hope," she said, with a superior tone in her voice, "that the first thing the Conservatives do will be to take off those iniquitous death-duties of Sir William Harcourt."

Lord Hawthorpe crossed the room to where Lady Stoborough was sitting, a woman who had once been famous for her beauty and her courage in the hunting-field. "Would you like," he asked, "to see Herbert's kennels? I'm going down to talk to his huntsman. There are some good hounds in the pack. You'll recognise Belvoir blood."

Lady Stoborough rose sadly but gratefully. Two or three other people said that they thought they would go into the garden. Presently there was a general movement towards the door. It was evident that among these relations and intimate friends of the dead duke the one powerful desire common to most was the desire to get away from Lady Theresa. The room all but emptied. She was left in the

library with no one else except an old gentleman who was nearly blind, an old lady who was entirely deaf, and a middle-aged lady rather weak in brain, who had such dreadfully prominent teeth that many of the village people at the funeral had been shocked by what they took to be her grin of derision. The old gentleman was fast asleep. The old lady was knitting for dear life. The middle-aged lady was grinning at the fire.

Lady Theresa was about to lay down the law on some subject or another when the door opened, and in came Mrs. Townley carrying Isabel's baby.

"Oh," exclaimed the lady of Cumberfield, coming to a stop just inside the door; "has everybody gone?"

"No, not everybody!" answered Lady Theresa, with a slight toss of her head.

"I thought some of them might like to see the baby," said Mrs. Townley, advancing rather doubtfully up the room.

The old gentleman snored a little. The old lady went on knitting, oblivious of Mrs. Townley's presence. But the middle-aged lady with the vacant brain turned her head and grinned very terribly at Mrs. Townley, who was now approaching with rather more confidence.

"I am sure *I* should like to see it," said Lady Theresa, rising from her chair. The great white face remained frozen and contemptuous, but there was a strange tone of condescending kindness in the voice.

Mrs. Townley had earned Herbert's undying love by taking off his hands all the management of those sad and difficult days. Admirably had she performed the office. Not a hitch had occurred in any of the complicated arrangements. The funeral itself had been conducted with a sanctifying simplicity and dignity which had greatly touched Herbert's heart. Everywhere, but without emphasis, Mrs. Townley's capable and orderly presence had been felt; and in nothing had she been more successful than in acting as hostess for her daughter Isabel. Her manner in this respect was perfect. She made it evident to all the guests that death did not abrogate a human being's right to reasonable comfort. There were fires in all the bedrooms, hot-water bottles in all the beds. Meals came by clockwork, and were attractive. She did not even suggest that wine should not be served. A certain solemnity characterised her expression and her manner, and she never stooped to anything that suggested mere amusement, but she was a very perfect hostess, and many

old people, who had dreaded the journey and the risks to their health at the graveside, were grateful to her for the sympathetic thoroughness with which she looked after their comforts.

It must be confessed that when a telegram arrived from Lady Theresa announcing her intention to attend the funeral Mrs. Townley had exclaimed to Isabel, "Oh, how I should like to send a pony-cart to meet her, and to put her in the coldest and smallest room on the bachelors' corridor!" But this was only her jest. She decided that the best carriage should be sent to the station for Lady Theresa, and that one of the noblest of the bedrooms should be set apart for her reception. She wished Herbert to be present in the hall to greet his aunt, but he excused himself from so unpleasant a duty, and suggested that Mr. Colby, the lawyer, should take his place at Mrs. Townley's side. If there was one person he could not bear to see just then it was his Aunt Theresa.

Mrs. Townley dreaded her meeting with this old pagan, dreaded to appear in any position of authority which might suggest triumph. But she was a woman who never shrank from duty, and when Lady Theresa arrived at the castle Mrs. Townley was standing by the fireplace in the circular hall ready to receive her as a person of importance.

The greeting had been cold on both sides, lacking in all warmth, but Lady Theresa had made no attack. Puffing and blowing from her ascent of the stairs, she had said soon after her arrival that she would like to go to her room, and Mrs. Townley herself had taken the old woman upstairs. At the door Lady Theresa had puffed out, "Thank you very much. Who is here? I know nothing. I suppose Algernon Stretton has come. It will probably kill him. He's nearly eighty. Is Mabel Stoborough here? Ah, she loves funerals, poor dear. Such a pretty woman years ago. And how is the new duchess?"

From that moment until she entered the library with Isabel's baby in her arms Mrs. Townley had scarcely exchanged another word with Lady Theresa, but she had noticed on several occasions that Lady Theresa had manifested no desire for a renewal of hostilities. Once, indeed, at the church, the enemy had gone out of her way to place Mrs. Townley in a chief position, close to Herbert. She had never shown the smallest sign of wishing to elbow Mrs. Townley out of her proper place in the castle.

Therefore the lady of Cumberfield was not wholly unprepared for Lady Theresa's friendliness towards Herbert's child, and, uncovering the baby's face, presented it to Lady Theresa with a confidence and a pride which became her homely features very well.

"I don't pretend to say who she is like," said Lady Theresa; "but she appears to me very healthy, and not in the least objectionable, as so many babies are—other people's babies."

"She is a beautiful baby," smiled Mrs. Townley.

"Well, if she is beautiful," laughed Lady Theresa, "Venus must be a great humbug, for I never saw anything less like Venus than a human baby. What do you think of her, Maria?"

This question was addressed to the grinning lady, who was now bending over the baby with one of the most diabolical of all her grins.

"Oh, I think she's nice," exclaimed Maria, sucking in her watery breath.

The deaf lady, knitting in hand, had come up, and was peering at the baby from Mrs. Townley's other side.

"How much does she weigh?" she demanded.

Lady Theresa said to Mrs. Townley, "You may say what you like, for she'll never hear you."

"Nine pounds, three ounces," replied Mrs. Townley.

"How much do you say?"

"Nine pounds, three ounces."

"I don't hear you."

Lady Theresa took up the task. "Ninety-nine pounds, nine ounces, and nine pennyweights," she shouted.

"Is she indeed?" said the old lady. "Well, she doesn't look it."

"Oh, I call her nice," said the lady with the teeth.

"She is nice," replied Mrs. Townley; "very nice indeed."

"I suppose it would show a proper interest in the child," said Lady Theresa, "to inquire after her bowels. Everything perfectly normal, I hope, in that direction? I'm glad to hear it. Babies nowadays seem to be supplied with curiously inefficient intestines. Why it should be so I do not pretend to know; but I am given to understand that the statistics of infantile mortality are quite alarming. It seems that in these days a child cannot suck its thumb without contracting some terrible complaint of the stomach. I am glad to know that my babies are all grown up."

"Oh, it is nice," cried Maria. "May I nurse it? I promise not to drop it."

"Now, Maria," cried Lady Theresa, "don't you dare to touch that baby. Go back to your chair. Why, I wouldn't trust you to carry a cup of tea across the room. Let the baby rest where it is." Then, addressing Mrs. Townley, "You are perfectly safe with the child, but, all the same, I think you ought to sit down."

Some moments later, when the baby was exhausted as a subject of conversation, Lady Theresa said to Mrs. Townley: "I daresay you have heard that Sir Anthony Holton has let his house?"

"Yes. I was surprised."

"It is very sensible of him. He has got rooms in St. James's Place, and has put his sisters into furnished apartments in Bournemouth. I understand that he is going out to South Africa very shortly. He knows a Mr. Cecil Rhodes out there, who is a wonderful person by all accounts. I think he owns diamond mines. By the way, the people who have taken Sir Anthony's place are friends of mine. I am going on to stay there to-morrow. I suppose you haven't called yet?"

"No."

"She is a very amusing woman. You would like her, I think. She subscribes liberally to charities—most generously, in fact; but all Jews are generous. I am told her husband has a great reputation in the City. I think he is one of the heads of the Stock Exchange. Perhaps you will come over while I am there."

"It will be difficult just now."

"Oh, well, later on. Your husband, I am sure, would like to know Mr. Kopstein. And now I want to talk to you about Herbert. What is he going to do? I hope your daughter will use all her influence to make him play a proper part in his country's affairs. I confess to you I do not like the way in which he is absenting himself from the rest of us, and leaving all his unpleasant work to you. I was saying just now, mawkishness is a dangerous thing. I am sure you will agree with me. Please tell him that I expect to see him before I go."

At this point poor Maria suddenly got up from the chair to which she had been ordered by Lady Theresa, and, running across the hearth with little mincing steps, fell on her knees before Mrs. Townley. "Do let me have," she pleaded, "just one more look. It is such a very nice baby."

"I do wish, Maria," exclaimed Lady Theresa, "that you would learn to restrain your emotions. I call your emotions perfectly disgusting."

But Mrs. Townley revealed the face of the sleeping child to poor grinning Maria, and Maria protested once again, but with even greater conviction, that the baby was nice.

IX

EVERYTHING that Isabel had learned, and everything that she had desired to know, dwindled into the strangest insignificance when she nursed the nice baby, the "canny bairn," for the first time.

Even the news of the duke's death, when it was at last broken to her, dreadful and almost shattering as it appeared at the moment, came to be, with a swiftness which surprised her, an event only for occasional sadness. Without the child that news might have seemed to her well-nigh insupportable, for she had certainly loved the old duke with great and strong affection; but so absorbing was the child, the child who cried for her breast, the child whose dark eyes would often shoot an arrow of the strangest and most conquering laughter into her young maternity, the child who seemed to say to her, "I own you; you are mine for the rest of your life"—so absorbing was this "canny bairn" that Isabel could think of nothing else at all for any effective length of time.

With Mrs. Townley's departure, and with the coming of spring, Isabel recovered her strength, and was presently able to leave her room, and soon afterwards to take her baby, in its nurse's arms, for drives through the awakening countryside. It was like a queen's progress. There was scarcely a cottage on her way where the womenfolk were not standing in the doorways or at the garden gates to wave a blessing to the "canny bairn" and their new duchess. Isabel loved their greetings; as she grew better she would stop the carriage at different points of the journey so that the women and their children might crowd about her and get a view of the child. She did, unconsciously, more for the Conservative party in those days than any of the organisers in London could have achieved by painful thought and a serious expenditure of money.

After the christening—a beautiful ceremony which brought

tears to the eyes of Roscoe—Herbert and Isabel settled down to the peaceful ways which they both loved so much better than all other ways put together. Herbert busied himself with the affairs of the estate, Isabel with the affairs of her nursery and her house. They went walks together, sometimes drove together, and took their meals together. Herbert did not feel so much interest in his daughter as Isabel could have wished, but she made no retaliation by yawning when he told her about his foals, his puppies, and his calves.

Isabel was soon to discover a new interest in life. When Herbert went off for his Yeomanry training she set to work to pay off a number of calls long overdue. She had no heart for such an occupation. She began rather crossly. It was pleasant enough to drive out on a beautiful afternoon with her baby and its nurse, but to stop at the houses of dull people and suffer their tedious conversation was really vexatious. However, in one of these houses she discovered a delightful woman who loved gardening, in another a most intelligent man and wife who went about the country picking up china and glass, and in a third a charming young mother who adored her babies. From conversations with these intelligent, nice people Isabel entered her carriage with glowing eyes and a mind conscious of refreshing activity. She decided that she would give luncheon-parties.

Herbert returned from his training to find a new spirit in his wife. She had become conscious of humanity. The cottagers, the miners, and the quarry folk were not neglected, but they were now not enough for her. She liked meeting intelligent people, people with whom she could discuss those things of taste and intellect which so interested her mind. She had become enthusiastic about gardening, and the delightful woman who knew much about gardens was constantly at DurrIDGE to help her with advice. The beautiful things in the castle were a never-failing attraction to the intelligent man and woman who drove about the country collecting china and glass; Isabel loved to take them round the rooms and exhibit her treasures, perhaps also her knowledge. Then there was her daughter Annabel, growing more beautiful and vivacious every day; it was the greatest fun in the world to get the charming young mother who adored babies to drive over with her children, and to play with them in the castle and in the gardens.

Perhaps Isabel was a little pleased with the deference paid to her as a duchess. To be addressed as "your Grace,"

to find herself regarded always as an honoured guest, to be the actual châtelaine of so splendid a place as Durrigle Castle, and to hear her baby spoken of by the servants and the cottagers as "her ladyship"—all these things contributed to her pleasure, without very seriously impairing her original modesty and her natural sweetness. She told herself that her position entailed duties, and she felt that those duties called for a certain amount of showing off.

In May of that year the Government majority had fallen to fourteen. Mr. Gladstone had departed, after a quarrel with Lord Spencer over naval estimates amounting to more than seventeen millions; Lord Rosebery was Prime Minister, with Sir William Harcourt as Chancellor of the Exchequer, who evidently disliked him. The whole country felt that the Liberal Government was tottering to its fall, and most of those people who believed in Conservatism were beginning to work for a general election.

Isabel wished Herbert to take a more active part in the life of the county. She was backed up in this matter by Hawthorpe and Montgomery, who came to shoot in the autumn. The duke, however, remained obdurate. "I leave all that to you," he would say; "my hands are full enough as it is." Hawthorpe agreed that the duke was doing his duty excellently well, but said that he might extend the sphere of his influence by presiding over meetings in different parts of the country. "Her Grace would write your speeches for you," he said, "so you'd have no extra strain on your intellectuals as far as that goes." But the duke said, "Politics bore me. I don't understand them. There are plenty of talkers already. No; I intend to stick to my job."

Something, however, came of these conversations. Aylmer Montgomery, whose liberalism had never been definitively Liberal, was adopted as Conservative candidate in a neighbouring constituency which had returned an advanced Radical for some ten years or more. Hawthorpe went over to preside at his first meetings; the duke was dragged off to shake hands with his committee and to sit on his platforms; Isabel, who had played no inconsiderable part in getting Montgomery adopted, occasionally drove through the constituency, paid calls, and gave flattering orders to local tradesmen.

Among the people on whom she called in this way were the doubtful Kopsteins from London. Her mother had urged her for some time to show the newcomers this courtesy, but Isabel, conscious of her great position in the county, had

hesitated. Now, however, in order to help Aylmer—for the Kopsteins had become extremely popular in the neighbourhood—Isabel called one afternoon at Anthony Holton's old home.

Mrs. Kopstein seemed to her excessively vulgar, but unquestionably amusing. She was a snob of snobs, but the frankest specimen of that order, making no bones at all of her desire to climb in the world, and to know only "the best people."

At Isabel's entrance she jumped up from her chair in the drawing-room, flung all the things in her lap on to the floor, and advancing hastily exclaimed with the greatest possible gusto, "Well, this is an honour, and no mistake about it. I declare," taking Isabel's hand, "my heart is all of a flutter. I can feel it knocking against my stays. You're the first duchess I've ever shaken hands with; as the saying goes, I hope you won't be the last. Oh, I can see at a glance, beautiful as you are, beautiful as a picture, that you aren't stand-offish; you understand homely people, don't you? Well, look at me keeping you standing. Where are my manners, if I've got any? Taken a day off, I suppose. Now, the best chair for you, and no other. I should think not! Come along. Aggie will be here in a minute. She's my daughter, and oh, how she adores country life—lawn tennis, croquet, and tea under the spreading chestnut-tree. Yes, but what about midge bites? I declare to you I could sometimes scratch my ankles clean off my legs. The country is all right for a bit, but give me London."

From this plump little boisterous person Isabel learned that Sir Anthony Holton had gone to South Africa.

"I don't mind telling you, my dear Duchess of Rothbury, that he's crazed about our Aggie; she's our only one, our one little ewe lamb, our first, sole, and final contribution to the human race; and so she'll have plenty of money, and other nice things; but my husband, who was a German to begin with—and they're very cute people, the Germans—says that Sir Anthony is—I'm treating you as an old friend, you see; telling you things I oughtn't to tell anyone—well, my husband says that Sir Anthony is too much of a gambler for his taste. I daresay you know what I mean. You'll infer what I don't impart! Mind you, I don't want to say a word against Sir Anthony. He's a baronet, and he's been very kind to us; I don't say it hasn't paid him; but there's no doubt he has done for us, as I tell my husband, what no other man could do so well or so naturally; he has introduced us into the

highest circles. Lady Theresa Grantham was the start, and now I'm talking to the beautiful young Duchess of Rothbury. But there's no doubt that, financially speaking, the baronet is rocky. So we are very glad he has gone to South Africa, and we hope our Aggie will be married to a gentleman of the old brigade, steady on his feet, and steady in his ways, and steady in his balance at the bank, before Sir Anthony gets back with half a dozen new prospectuses in his pocket. Ah, here comes my Aggie. Aggie, my dear, come and make a pretty curtsy to her Grace the Duchess of Rothbury."

Isabel refused an effusive invitation to stay for tea; she had promised to call on two dear old ladies who lived in this neighbourhood, and who were even now eagerly looking for her arrival. She took leave of Mrs. and Miss Kopstein with a certain amount of careful dignity, and yet with the feeling in her heart that she would like to see more of them. They were vulgar, but they had an unmistakable reality which interested her in an amusing way. She felt that she could make Herbert smile by telling him about them.

The two old ladies, Miss Louisa Dinsdale and Miss Catherine Dinsdale, on whom Isabel proceeded to call, occupied a charming small house midway between Anthony Holton's place and Cumberfield. It stood back merely some fifty yards from the road, but the road was a humble one—little more than a well-kept lane, leading only to the church and the rectory—and the house of the old ladies enjoyed a privacy which at every point it well deserved.

Never was there little house which would have been more put about by a rush of traffic or an indecorous noise of any kind. It quite understood the sudden sound of the old ladies' pony-cart when the wheels scrunched into the loose flint of the "carriage sweep," and it had no rooted objection to the creak and clank of the garden-roller which the handy-man pulled up and down the lawns whenever he had nothing else very particular to do. As for the rooks, the old white house seemed to find a certain music in their cawing; and as for the blackbirds and thrushes, the robins and linnets, the finches and sparrows, which loved its hedges, its trees, its garden walls, and its row of well-kept outhouses, the old place would not have known what had become of it if it had failed to hear their singing and their chirping. But the intermittent sound which was dearest to it of all was no doubt the clash of the church bells.

Orderly, peaceful, and charming as was the garden of the old ladies, the house itself in those particular respects far

exceeded its surroundings. It was one of those houses characteristic of England, in which great comfort and the most exacting taste flourish on a scale which is neither grandiose nor pedantic. An income of something over £800 a year enabled these two old ladies to live in their father's freehold—he had been a very popular general practitioner, with patients all over the county—and to maintain something of the quiet dignity which he had always observed in his home.

The furniture was generally a good type of Victorian craftsmanship, but throughout the house were to be seen by the discerning "pieces" of great value, some of which the old doctor, not too scrupulous in such matters, had picked up for a few shillings. There was, for example, standing in the hall, a most noble grandfather-clock by Graham, who lies buried in Westminster Abbey, and a Hogarth chair of the grandest dignity; in the drawing-room, bright with some good china, were two very beautiful Queen Anne cabinets filled with glass of the rarest kind—particularly Jacobean glass; while in the dining-room the old ladies displayed on a solid mahogany sideboard their greatest treasure of all—a complete tea-service in silver of George the Third's reign, the teapot proudly conscious of resting on its original stand.

Devoted to their house and their garden, these old ladies found plenty of time to call upon the villagers, to organise lectures on arts and crafts, and to take a great deal of rather tiresome work off the hands of their beloved rector, who was a scholar, and loved to be left alone with his books. He called them his two curates, and said that if he went up and down the country for a year, seeking out the best of all curates, which God forbid, he should never find an ordained young man fit to hold a candle to his venerable friends.

The amount of quiet good done by these old-fashioned ladies can never be told; it was of a nature not to be traced, and of a persistence which goes down the generations in a thousand unperceived directions. And the charming part of it all was that they never had the least idea of the greatness of their work, and were only afraid lest they should be thought by the villagers to be rather interfering, and perhaps a little fussy in getting up entertainments, sales of work, and classes for adult education.

Although their excitement at Isabel's visit was high, they gave no sign of it when she arrived. There they were, both together, dressed alike, equally grey, equally faded, equally bright and intelligent in the eye, standing side by side at the

front door as Isabel's great horses scattered the loose flint chippings from side to side and pretended to be afraid of falling either into a flower-bed or through the parlour window. One of the old ladies carried a pair of garden gloves, a basket, and a pair of flower-scissors in her left hand ; the other had a copy of the *Spectator* under her arm, and in her hand a pair of spectacles for reading.

They had known Isabel from childhood, for they were among Mrs. Townley's most faithful workers, but this was the first time they had seen her since the birth of her child, and they were full of a great pleasure at the thought of welcoming her as a mother.

"I suppose," Miss Catherine had said, "we should still address her as Isabel."

"My dear, you don't think, I hope, of saying 'your Grace'!"

"No, but I did think, dear, of occasionally dropping in a 'duchess.'"

"Well, please yourself, Catherine," said Miss Louisa. "As for me, I called her Isabel when she hadn't a tooth in her head, and I shall continue to call her Isabel till she tells me not to do so, and then I shall ring the bell for her carriage."

"I believe you would!" laughed Miss Catherine. "In fact, you are so downright and outspoken that I think you would stop at nothing."

Isabel enjoyed her visit to the old ladies. She became so happy in their company that she decided they must come to Durrige and spend a whole day with her, if only to see the "canny bairn."

"The trouble, my dear, is the long journey," said Louisa.

"Our pony, you see, is not up to more than eight miles," put in Catherine.

"Come, sister, he took us to Davensham last week, and that's a good fourteen miles the two ways. Don't make him out to be worse than he is."

"I shall send a carriage for you," said Isabel.

"Oh, that will be most kind," said Louisa.

"Most kind, indeed," added Catherine, beaming like anything.

"When old Sir Richard Holton was alive," said Louisa, "we often had a carriage put at our disposal."

"These new people, of course, would never think of offering us a carriage."

"And we shouldn't accept the offer if they did."

"They tell us, Isabel, that these newcomers have twenty horses in their stables. Very rich people, we understand. Anthony asked us to call upon them, and we have done so. We think her very amusing, and we hear she is extremely generous; but we were a little terrified by him."

"He grunts and growls," said Louisa, "and his waistcoat and tie are always smothered in cigar ash. There's a musty, stale smell about the man."

"We've only seen him twice, Louisa!"

"A woman can always judge a man, finally, in one glance."

Isabel told them that she had just called upon the Kopsteins, and for some time the two old ladies, greatly excited, and perhaps a little shocked, cross-examined her on her impressions. To them the Kopsteins were definitely foreigners, and, with the sagacity of country people, they feared the consequences on English life of alien influences of any kind.

"I am afraid," said Catherine, "they think more of card-playing than of book-reading."

"We hear of young men being encouraged to go there," said Louisa, "and the story is that a good deal of champagne is drunk at dinner, and a good deal of whiskey at the card-tables. Very bad for the servants—very. I am sorry to say that Lady Theresa Grantham——"

Catherine coughed under her breath, and fidgeted uneasily in her chair.

"I am sure Isabel will not mind what I am going to say."

"Not in the least," laughed Isabel.

"Oh," exclaimed Catherine, "I'm so glad that you don't quite approve of Lady Theresa. We knew that your mother didn't."

"I shouldn't have begun to say what I intended to say," quoth Louisa, "if I had not known that no one from Cumberfield could possibly approve of Lady Theresa Grantham. To be quite flat, she is a wicked, bad woman, and excessively vulgar to boot. How she could stay with such people as these Kopsteins—*stay with them*—I cannot imagine! It only shows to what depths people can fall in their worship of money."

"It's so bad for England, isn't it, dear Isabel?"

"We are very much afraid," said Louisa, "that Anthony may be mixing himself up with people of this kind in London. He thinks now of nothing but finance. He is always promising to make our fortunes. I daresay you have heard that he has gone to South Africa."

"Yes, I had heard that."

"He is very clever," said Catherine, "and also very good ;

and I feel quite sure that he will always do what is wise and prudent. South Africa, too, does seem——”

“In the hands of a Jew,” said Louisa, “that is to say, in the hands of an unscrupulous Jew, particularly a German Jew, every Englishman is a mere baby.”

“You must not say a *mere* baby!” laughed Isabel.

“Ah, no!” exclaimed Catherine, and clasped her hands.

“Oh, my dear, we are simply longing to see your little Annabel. She must be perfectly lovely.”

“Well, she is rather a splendid thing,” said Isabel, and glanced at the clock.

X

FROM these small beginnings Isabel's social life gradually and almost imperceptibly developed into an affair of the county. Her mother's influence began to make itself felt in her character, and very often she was aware of the stirrings of ambition, which always masqueraded, however, in the guise of social duty.

The county was delighted. DurrIDGE no longer held itself aloof from the secular life of mankind, like some solemn mausoleum guarding an impressive but unprofitable corpse. There were dinner-parties in the winter of 1894, and garden-parties in the summer of 1895, when the Liberal Government had resigned and Lord Salisbury was once again Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ireland. The dissolution in July was an admirable pretext for Isabel to make a bolder advance along the path of public life. DurrIDGE became something of an hotel for the Conservative party.

All this activity on Isabel's part necessitated, of course, no little attention to the arbitrary changes continually taking place in the world of millinery. She devoted some of her time to a study of illustrated weekly papers which keep provincial ladies abreast of London taste and Paris fashions. She was frequently writing to the most expensive of London shop-keepers, and every now and then her mind would be visited by the idea of a season in London. People who had hitherto spoken of Isabel's brilliant intellect and her wonderful knowledge of antiquities were now heard to talk about the exquisite elegance of her taste in dress.

One day, at a time when the Conservatives were rejoicing over the defeat of Sir William Harcourt, Mr. John Morley, and the working man candidate Mr. Keir Hardie, Isabel

returned from a visit to Cumberfield to find the library full of excited politicians. She stayed with them for a few minutes, flattered by the attention of great men and pleased by the admiration of handsome men, and then withdrew to find Herbert. She had a great piece of news for him. Arthur Hawthorne was engaged to be married.

She discovered him eventually in his turret-room, and, to her amazement, found him seated in an arm-chair with Annabel on his lap and a picture-book in his hands.

The child lifted her head quickly at Isabel's entrance, regarded her for a moment with a displeased stare, and then flung herself against her father's chest, putting up her hands to his neck, and reaching up to kiss his chin. Almost at the same moment she worked her face round and stole a look at Isabel out of the corner of one eye, as if she desired to see that her mother was properly conscious of a second place in her affections.

Isabel, standing there in the magnificence of her fashionable raiment, and still flushed by the reception she had encountered in the library, was struck by the beauty of the scene before her—the very shabbiness of its setting seeming to accentuate that beauty.

Herbert glanced at her, over his child's head, with a look that was boyish in its self-consciousness, as though she had caught him out. He was dressed in old clothes, which harmonised with the worn character of the chair in which he was sitting, and the child on his lap was in so tumbled and untidy a condition that she as charmingly harmonised with him as he with his chair. Moreover, they were both as brown as gypsies.

"How do you explain this?" asked Isabel with a smile, advancing, and kneeling down at the chair. She put her arm round Annabel's plump body.

"She found me out," replied the duke, conscious of the scent in his wife's raiment.

"And how long has she been here, pray?"

"About half an hour." He glanced at the clock. "No, by Jove, longer; about three quarters."

"And how have you got on?"

"Oh, pretty well."

This was evidently not enough for Annabel. She let herself fall against Herbert's breast, and began kissing his waistcoat and clawing at his arms.

"Well, Annabel," said her mother, "you are really a most daring and unaccountable child. All the same, you are

rather a darling." She kissed Annabel and then fell to tickling her, producing shouts of laughter and much vigorous wriggling.

There was a knock at the door, and in came the nurse, smiling with pride and rosy with satisfaction. The two women exchanged glances.

"Time for bed," said the nurse.

"No!" shouted Annabel, sitting bolt upright, very flushed, her eyes sparkling with laughter.

"None of your 'No' to me, young lady. You wait a minute!"

"No!"

"Did your Grace ever hear such a thing!" asked the nurse, turning to Isabel. "Now, come along at once."

Annabel made a tremendous effort at human speech.

"Daddy! Want daddy," she cried.

"Oh, yes, to be sure! You want your daddy! As if you haven't been saying that all day long, till you nearly drove me out of my wits. Now you come along, miss, and *instantly*, or you'll get no supper; I tell you that."

The child clung to her father. It was plain that she had made up her mind to one of two courses—either to stay where she was, or to make him go with her.

The duke smiled. "All right, I'll carry you."

"Bath," said Annabel.

"What next, I wonder," said the nurse. "Wants his Grace to see her in her bath!" Again she looked at Isabel, as if to say, "We've got him now; he can never escape us."

That was the beginning of a great and deep friendship between Herbert and Annabel. When all the country was talking about Mr. Joseph Chamberlain in the rôle of Imperialist, and when Mr. Chamberlain was taking up with vigour Lord Ripon's quarrel with President Kruger for that dour old Boer's treatment of British subjects in the Transvaal, and, later in the year, when President Grover Cleveland, of the United States of America, was threatening England with war, and when, in consequence, the whole country and a great part of the civilised world were in an unmistakable flutter of high political excitement, the young Duke of Rothbury was quietly discovering in the love of a child a happiness greater than anything he had known.

That Christmas was a wonderful occasion at DurrIDGE. The duke had ordered a chair-saddle to be made for Annabel, had bought her a pretty little Shetland pony, and, through

Hawthorpe, had got hold of a very lively Irish terrier puppy—all presents for Annabel.

The joy of the child in these possessions was turbulent and ecstatic. She was one of those vigorous children who express themselves with an intense energy, and who have to be rigorously schooled before they can understand the value of restraint. When she was happy she shouted. When she was very happy she clutched herself, wriggled like a worm, contorted her face, and stamped on the ground. When she wanted to say "Thank you," she flung herself on the object of her gratitude and hugged with a feverish passion. She was fat. She was rosy. She was exceedingly bright-eyed. When she walked she took a stride perfectly amazing in so young a child, and swung her arms like a man. If she fell, she never cried; on the contrary, she shouted with laughter; getting up again, she would again fall flat on the ground, but this time on purpose, and, lying flat on her face, would laugh harder than ever—laugh till grown-ups feared convulsions.

Perhaps she adored her father because he was so quiet and restrained. No one ever caught him in any tenderness with the child. He talked to her almost gravely; he entered into her games with a seriousness which suggested that they were matters of no small consequence; and when he took her out with him his conversation turned on natural history, and consisted of explanations which the child could hardly have understood. She never asked him for a story; and he never danced her in his arms. They were entirely united in a love as perfect as it could be, but how they managed to tolerate, much more to understand, each other's nature neither Isabel nor the nurse could explain.

This love deepened with every day. The New Year brought grave political anxiety to England, and Herbert was not now so unmindful, as in times past, of such high matters; but the beautiful domestic life of DurrIDGE continued on its tranquil course. It was a world apart, and a world in which everything was as perfect as the heart of man could make it.

On January the First Dr. Leander Jameson, of whom few people in England had heard, entered the Transvaal at the head of armed troops, and was arrested by the forces of President Kruger. Two days later the Emperor of Germany sent a telegram to President Kruger congratulating him, in terms obviously intended to be offensive to England, on his courageous action. Soon afterwards England mobilised a flying squadron of battleships and cruisers, and there was

the wildest talk of a war with Germany. But Aylmer Montgomery, who was now a Member of Parliament, explained to Herbert and Isabel that this mobilisation was not really intended as a provocative answer to Germany, but only as a friendly hint to a violent minority in America which was striving with feverish energy to force President Cleveland into war. "Lord Salisbury," he said, "is the wisest, the astutest, of Foreign Ministers; he does not believe in the hazardous experiment of war; I am quite sure that friendly Americans have suggested to him that a little manifestation of his intentions not to be bullied would be extremely helpful just now to their rather apoplectic President."

But the majority of people in England were convinced that Lord Salisbury intended to tell the young Emperor of Germany that he could not insult his grandmother and the Union Jack without getting a rap over the knuckles. A war with Germany at that time—a war comfortably far off from English shores and soon over—would have been welcomed by many hearty and rather thoughtless people in the British Islands. Germany was regarded as an upstart, and its Emperor was derisively despised as a braggart, with no inkling of a gentleman. Moreover, the pressure of German trade competition was making the very name of Germany hateful to English ears. So it came about that the ex-republican, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, with his glassy eye, his low voice, and his biting tongue, found himself regarded as something of a Palmerston, urged on all sides to show President Kruger that England allowed no one in any quarter of the world to treat a British subject of Queen Victoria like an Asiatic coolie or a pariah dog.

In these heady times Isabel's second child came into the world, and once more it was a case of a daughter. But so easily does political excitement pass that by the time Isabel was up and about anyone might have thought that the world had never contemplated anything so odious as war, or was looking forward to anything but the millennium.

In peace and joy England pursued her way, no shadow from the increasing industrial competition of Germany falling across her gay and pleasant social life. Old Mr. Townley might gravely shake his head; Mr. Kopstein might smile grimly when he read comfortable leading articles in middle-class English newspapers; Mr. Haldane might warningly quote Matthew Arnold to his philosophical and scientific friends; and British commercial travellers might return

from foreign journeys with dismal reports of German penetration all over the world ; but food was cheap, unemployment was not dangerous, slums were not mutinous, prosperity was marvellously increasing among the middle classes, and society was perfectly satisfied with the pleasures provided for it by repetitious fashion.

Perhaps the glory of the nineteenth century reached its height, so far as England was concerned, in the following year, 1897, when the venerable Queen celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of her accession to the throne. This Diamond Jubilee, as it was somewhat vulgarly called, brought into the streets of London a demonstration of British power from the four corners of the globe which would perhaps have turned the head of any other nation in the world—a demonstration of Imperial splendour such as no Empire of the past had ever known, a demonstration of strength, wealth, youth, and hope such as would have satisfied the soul of Alexander or Napoleon.

Although the nation gave no sign of losing its head over this superb pageant of its world-wide power, Mr. Rudyard Kipling published a poem which became at once the solemn hymn of the British people. All over the country it was printed, quoted, recited, and preached about, proving that it had touched one of the deepest chords in English nature. A stranger might have thought that no nation in the world was more mindful of man's higher allegiance to the Power that overrules the universe, and that no nation of the earth was less likely to forget its duty or to quarrel with the nemesis which overtakes immoral use of power.

The captains and the kings departed, the Britons from overseas returned to their young lands, and the Old Country, with its cathedrals and its abbeys, its old games and its old ways, piously and solemnly reminded itself of the spiritual reality that underlay the recent pageant of its majestic glory :

Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
A humble and a contrite heart.

In November of that year Germany seized Kiaou-Chau, in China, and the Emperor shook his " mailed fist " in the face of mankind.

XI

"I WONDER," said Mr. Robert Finch, lowering *The Times* and addressing himself to Herbert, "what would have been the comment of my old friend, your great-grandfather, on this piece of news. I daresay you know that he had a great desire to outlive Mr. Gladstone."

Herbert, who had Annabel on his knee, reflected to himself that it was strange how long ago it now seemed to him since the old duke was alive. "Well, Mr. Gladstone is dead," sighed Robert Finch, "and I heard from Herbert Bismarck the other day that it will not be long before his father passes from this troubled earth. They are all going, one by one, the great men of Europe, the giants of the century."

Annabel pricked up her ears. "Are there *real* giants?" she asked her father.

"Not now," said the duke.

"I hope that's not true," sighed Finch. "We are speaking, Annabel, of great men," he explained; "men so great and so good that they seem taller than the rest of us; seem to— to tower over us. Not real giants, darling, but great big good men." He addressed himself to Herbert. "The way in which Lord Salisbury has prevented a coalition of European Powers against America in this war with Spain marks him out, I think, as a giant. I am sure that friendship with America will be increasingly necessary to the working out of our destiny. I like to think that there will one day be a union of all English-speaking peoples—not a political union, but a moral and intellectual union. Some such understanding I believe to be essential to world peace. I hope you agree with me."

"I know nothing of Americans," replied the duke. "I rather thought, however, that they disliked us. Is that so?"

"Ireland!" sighed Mr. Finch. "Ah, dear me, what a millstone round our neck that unhappy country has been, is, and always will be. But I meet a fair number of Americans in London who are by no means our enemies, though they think we ought to give Ireland Home Rule. The women are delightful—very well read, excellent manners, beautifully dressed. Among the men are scholars of a high order. I am devoted to Mr. Lowell. I saw a good deal of him in London, when he was Ambassador; a most accomplished man, and a very delightful companion. That reminds me; he once told Irishmen when he was over here that the only insurrection which had ever done them any good was the

insurrection headed by Father Mathew, the great temperance reformer. Very sagacious ! ”

Annabel waited politely till the old gentleman had finished, and then asked him whether he would not like her to show him her pony, explaining that she now had a real saddle with real stirrups. Mr. Finch, who found conversation with Herbert a little difficult, expressed an instant readiness to go with Annabel wherever she might choose to lead. The Irish terrier jumped up, and Annabel slipped down from her father's knee. She put out her hand to Mr. Finch, and when he had taken it stretched the other to her father. “ You may come too,” she said ; “ but *I'll* show Mr. Finch the pony, and the saddle too.”

When they were walking across the gardens to the stables Mr. Finch, who was getting a little slow on his feet, stopped, turned round, and surveyed the castle.

“ I am so thankful, my dear Herbert,” he said, “ to feel that this glorious old place is in such good hands. You and Isabel, if I may say so as a very old friend, are maintaining the best traditions of English life. I never meet a strident person here. I never see things that pain me. I never hear a word that distresses me. I hope you will never give up your horses for these dreadful new motor-cars, which rattle and smell and drop oil about wherever they go. Ah, no ! Durrige is perfect, and must remain perfect. In London it is very different, and I assure you that many of our noblest old country houses are now little more than the kind of hotel one expects to see at such places as Brighton. You must have been shocked, I am sure, to hear that the Prince of Wales dined with those dreadful Kopsteins when he was staying up here with the Newsomes. He is an amiable person, but his friends are very second rate. The Kopsteins, I hear, indulge in baccarat. He goes there, but he does not come to you ; he does not go to Cumberland. But how beautiful is this place ; how much there is to see in it ; how lovely is the life you and Isabel live with your children. Why didn't he come here ? I don't understand it.”

“ We are very quiet people,” said the duke, as they went forward again.

“ But isn't that the quality our Prince should admire and honour ? It used to be so. Dear Constance Westminster, as saintlike as she was beautiful, what a home she made of Eaton and Grosvenor House ! I believe she tried to influence the Prince. He greatly admired her at one time ; ah, yes, one

remembers that incident. Ronny Gower tells a strange story of those days. But you know, my dear Herbert, the destruction of everything is money. The Jew is completing the work of Darwin. London is given up to the worship of money. There's a great excitement just now about South African mines. I hear that Anthony Holton stands to win over a million. Your aunt, a very old friend of mine—I speak of Theresa Grantham—is as bad as the rest of the world. She thinks of nothing else; she talks of nothing else. I do not want to be scandalous, but I have reason to think, my dear Herbert, that she is actually selling some of her domestic possessions—china and glass, for example—in order to gamble in these mining shares. I will tell you what makes me say that. She used to have on the mantelpiece of her drawing-room two beautiful powder-blue vases; I have told Isabel about them; wonderful things. I coveted them for my collection. Well, they disappeared from the mantelpiece some two or three years ago. I asked where they had gone. She *told* me that she had put them away. But a month ago I came across them in Strongham Place. I asked Lady Chevington how she had got them. She told me that her husband bought them at Christie's. Why, my dear fellow, I would have bought them from your aunt a hundred times over. She had only to name her price. She must have known that. Why this secrecy? I tell you, I am uneasy about her. But all the world is mad on money. Culture is dead. Manners are perishing. Morals will go. Thank God that you and Isabel, with your two charming children, still keep up the ancient standards of our race."

By the autumn of that same year—1898—the children of the Duke and Duchess of Rothbury numbered three, and the new addition was also a girl. Their names were Annabel, Elizabeth, and Mary.

XII

THE splendour of the Diamond Jubilee had hardly faded from the public mind when the nation found itself in the possession of a new hero. Out of Egypt came this hero, Herbert Kitchener, a young soldier who long ago had set himself to avenge the murder of General Gordon at Khartoum, and who, now, after eleven years, had not only broken the forces of the Khalifa at Omdurman, but by his firm handling of a difficult situation at Fashoda had saved the Soudan from predatory France.

Even the tranquil life of DurrIDGE was stirred by these events. Annabel, who ought to have been a boy, would stare at pictures of Sir Herbert Kitchener, cultivate his frown, march about like a soldier, shout commands to Elizabeth, and cry "*A bas Major Marchand!*" She asked her father endless questions about the Sirdar, "the man who had made himself a machine," and listened with visible attention when Lord Hawthorpe was talking about Herbert Kitchener and saying that he possessed in his character that element of hardness which is essential to the true Englishman.

Whenever there was any industrial trouble in England the people round Annabel would say, "Why doesn't the Government send for Kitchener?" And whenever the speech of a revolutionist was published in the newspaper these same people would say, "What we want in England is a man like Kitchener." Annabel, therefore, had two heroes, her father and Sir Herbert Kitchener. Fortunately for the duke's share in her worship, it did not altogether depend on the fact that he occasionally wore Yeomanry uniform; Annabel worshipped him as a Master of Fox Hounds and also as her father.

Little more than a year had passed from the victory of Omdurman when England found herself once more involved in war. President Kruger had sent an ultimatum to Mr. Chamberlain, his forces had crossed the border into Natal, and, although many people grieved that the closing years of Queen Victoria's reign should be darkened by another little war, still, as it was to be a very little war, the masses of the people rejoiced to see the Old Country buckling on its armour once more like a young giant.

Three months later the nation was plunged in gloom. Disaster had befallen British arms. The flower of the British Army had been not only held in check, but had been terribly mauled by these unaccountable Boers. People spoke of the "black week" when these disasters became known. A great statesman said that England as a world power was on her trial. Annabel, like everyone else, was calling for Kitchener, the magic Kitchener, the man who had made himself a machine; but the Government decided to send an even greater soldier to save the honour of Britain, and Kitchener went only as chief of the staff to the veteran Lord Roberts.

Isabel, who now considered herself something of a figure in the public life of her country, took all these events with great seriousness. It must be confessed that there were occasions when she bored Lord and Lady Hawthorpe and rather

troubled Mr. Aylmer Montgomery. As for Herbert, it seemed to him that Isabel was given to expressing at a somewhat tiresome length, and in language unnecessarily pedantic, opinions which most people took for granted. All the same, he never complained either of his wife's volubility or of her increasing appetite for public appearances. He was unsympathetic only when she spoke of a visit to London.

One day Annabel was shouting for joy. It was not because of any victory in the Transvaal, but because her father was going out with his gallant Yeomanry to end the war. He was going out to fight with Kitchener and Lord Roberts. All would now be well. She told the men in the stables, and the men in the kennels, and the men in the gardens, that her father was going out to fight in the war, and as she told them this news she trembled with the deepest joy she had ever known.

"I am sorry," Isabel said to Herbert, "that you won't be here in February. But you will sure to be home soon after; and I do so hope that this time I shall give you a son."

"I am perfectly content with daughters," he replied. Then, more thoughtfully, "I'm not so sure that I should know how to bring up a son. Perhaps we should have to call in Hawthorpe. But you'll never beat Annabel."

There was so much to do in those days that Herbert had no time to grieve about leaving DurrIDGE, or to speculate upon what happens to a man of peace in the midst of war. Mr. Colby had to be sent for; there were many documents to sign, for the great business of the estate, with its coal-mines and quarries, had to be put on a new basis in the absence of its lord.

His last word to Annabel was the injunction to take care of DurrIDGE till he came back.

XIII

On Valentine's Day, in that year 1900, the bells of DurrIDGE broke out one morning with a peal of thanksgiving, and soon afterwards the villagers for many miles around were saying that there would soon be rare festivities at the castle now that an heir was born to the duke. But before March had quite gone out the men in the quarries and the shepherds on the hills stopped suddenly at their work, startled by the sound of a bell tolling from DurrIDGE church. Those who could see the castle among its embowering trees saw that the flag on its tower was flying at half mast.

It happened that Mr. Robert Finch was lunching at a

house in London on the same day that the Durridge bell tolled for the dead duke, who had been shot through the heart at the storming of Pieter's Hill. Among the guests on that occasion was the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, whose anxieties concerning the South African War were perhaps greater than those of any other man in the Government.

Mr. Finch spoke at length about the dead duke, the young duchess, the charming children, and the infant heir. He spoke so naturally and so movingly that the Secretary for the Colonies carried away with him from that table a memory which hung about his thoughts for the rest of the day. Towards evening he took a sheet of paper and addressed a few words of sympathy to the widowed duchess. He concluded this letter by saying that he believed the child in her arms would grow up to see in the Dominion of South Africa a witness to the Imperial destiny of the British people which would, in some measure at least, console him for the loss of his father's life, and perhaps inspire him to take a Roman's part in the history of his country.

When Isabel received this letter she was so utterly broken down and crushed by her loss that for a whole day she was almost angered by it. But on the following day, looking down on her son as he slept in his cot, it came to her that everything in human life was now summed up for her in the one and supreme duty of training Herbert's son to be an Englishman after his father's heart. She turned from the sleeping child to the letter of the statesman, read it again, but this time with something of a glow in her blood, and then knelt down and asked God to bless her in the work of training this son to understand the word duty as the greatest of his ancestors had understood it for so many centuries of English history.

Herbert had written to her on hearing of the birth of his son. She now took that letter from her bureau, sacred because it was the last he had written to her, and read it over again.

"MY DEAR ISABEL,—I wish I could be with you. It is a great thought that I am now the father of a son. We will take a lot of pains to make him 'a stout lad.' Lots of gentleness, but no softness. I've learnt a lot out here. There's something in the private soldier that's not always easy to see in the officer. I don't know how to describe it. But I think it comes from a rough-and-tumble bringing up—nature's way. It's wonderful how cheerful they are in most uncomfortable situations; and they're good nature

itself. I'm tremendously proud of my lot. When one of them gets killed it hurts me more than I can tell you. I seem to be always writing to poor mothers telling them the sad news.

"I should like our son to be self-reliant, good-natured, cheerful, high-spirited, and never making a fuss about trifles. I think we ought to encourage him to play games with the village children and to go about a lot with the keepers and quarrymen. You'll smile at all this, but I've been thinking ever since I came out here that if it was a son this time I should like to take a lot of pains in making him a thoroughbred Englishman. I'm afraid they're getting a bit scarce in our class. Take care of yourself, for you'll soon have to see that he sets out in the right way and learns from the first what is expected of a Northcountryman. Nothing finicky!

"I'll write again next week.

"With love,

"Your affectionate husband,

"HERBERT.

"P.S.—Don't let Annabel think that the new baby has put her nose out of joint. We shall never beat her in any of our children. I often look at her photograph. My love to her and to the other two canny bairns, and of course to our son. I hope he promises to be a real good strapper. I'd like him called George. You'll know why."

The crudity of this letter struck Isabel even in her grief, fresh as she was from reading the letter of the Minister, so graceful in expression, so solemn in its lofty patriotism. She could not comprehend what Herbert meant by his suggestion that their son should play with village children, and associate with keepers and quarrymen. All the same, the letter moved her in its own way, rousing memories of her husband which jangled her heartstrings, and deepening in her mind its uppermost idea that she was now charged with a mission as paramount as it was sacred. "He shall grow up," she told herself, "to be the first Englishman of his day, and, with God's help, all the world shall feel his hand upon its life."

She placed Mr. Chamberlain's letter with her husband's, and went to the window of her room and looked out on the far-spreading park, slowly beginning to wake from its winter sleep. As she stood there, she remembered how Herbert had once said to her that Durrige was a good place to come back

to, and at that memory, and at the thought that he would now never come back to it again, tears gathered in her eyes, and her heart became once more heavy with the burden of its loss.

It was terrible, that loss. Herbert was surely the most lovable man that ever lived. Intellect did not really count in the highest altitudes of human life. What was it that really counted? It was character. Personality came to her with a new wonder. Herbert in personality was the greatest man she had ever known. In spite of his boyish mind, his many ignorances, his narrow outlook, his lack of all intellectual curiosity, and his almost rustic absorption in local things, he had a greatness of spirit which seemed to her more admirable, and more worthy of reverence, than all the gifts of talent. In what did that greatness consist? Who is able to analyse personality and catalogue the forces of spirit? And yet she could at least say this—that Herbert's greatness had its rise in a sincerity that was like a giant's strength, in an inward veracity of soul that no temptation could corrupt, an honesty of the whole man that none could either contaminate or deceive.

It was this tremendous moral strength of the man which had made his tenderness to the children so moving a thing in her eyes. She recalled her delight, too, in watching the smile which came into his grave eyes when he played with his dogs or stood looking at any young animals. Ah, that was the tenderness and gentleness of a soul that was like iron in all the great things of life. Unemotional? No, no: full of emotion, full of sentiment, but controlled by a certain dignity of the mind that was never off duty. Who could tell what secret thoughts had stirred in that silent mind when he looked up at the stars or knelt in prayer? His love for Durrig—surely that was a witness to his possession of poetry. He had been a greater man than she had supposed. She had made too much of his inarticulateness, too little—ah, far, far too little of the gentleness and tenderness of a soul so incorruptibly strong. Why had she not seen that greatness? How had she missed till now the grandeur of his character? An eternal Being, it was manifest, could think little of human talents, must see nothing for wonder in even the greatest works of human genius; but in a character so strong and yet so gentle, so pure and yet masculine, so lofty and yet unassuming, surely even God might see justification for the travail of human history. Nobility of soul—

yes, that was the phrase ; Herbert had possessed the greatest of all the graces—nobility of soul.

She began to see a meaning in Herbert's last letter—an idea deeper than she had imagined, an ambition higher than that of the Colonial Minister's. The park which he had so greatly loved, waking from its winter sleep, gave to Isabel her first adequate realisation of Herbert's character ; and, standing there at the window, for a few brief moments in her life she was almost face to face with his soul.

When she was able to move more freely about the castle she would go often to Herbert's room in the turret, and sit there looking at the things which had surrounded him from boyhood. One day, with her child in her arms, she visited this room, and went to the window. The sun was shining, and she opened the window to let air into the room, which was still haunted by a smell of tobacco, a smell which she loved for the dead man's sake, and which always brought him back to her with almost the sense of physical nearness.

As she opened the window the noise of the Force entered the little room, and with that clangorous sound came almost at once, as if borne on those very waves, the memory of Aylmer Montgomery's words on the night of Herbert's coming of age. She had quoted Matthew Arnold's poetry, and Aylmer Montgomery had diverted her quotation to history and politics, making the river a symbol of the English people.

Far back, and completely out of her view, was the early history of this river, roaring down in many streams from the rough northern hills of its birth. Out of sight from this window too was its middle history of pastoral peace and gentle loveliness—the Arcadian days of England that could never now return. Here only was the crash to which England was moving, the sudden catastrophe which was to change the whole character of the stream, and send it hurling over many rocks to the engulfing sea—the end of one era, the beginning of another ; the end of the known, the beginning of the unknown.

She laid her cheek to the child's face, held him more firmly in her arms and closer to her breast, and, looking out on the cataract below her, began to dream dreams for Herbert's heir which had never entered his dead father's mind. Into these exalted dreams Herbert, with his grave eyes and quiet voice, never entered for a moment ; but in every fresh vision that presented itself to Isabel's mind the figure of Aylmer Montgomery was there in the background. When she closed

the window she had decided that Aylmer Montgomery must help her to train the child in her arms so that he might play a hero's part in the future history of his nation. Hawthorne was absorbed in married life. Aylmer Montgomery was still her faithful knight.

On January the twenty-second, in the year one thousand nine hundred and one, the surly bell of Durridge church tower tolled out the news to people in that part of England that their Queen was dead and an epoch in their history ended.



BOOK III



BOOK III

I

IN the library of Cumberfield, remote from the incessant bustle of that strenuous and philanthropic household, old Mr. Christopher Townley sat in a comfortable arm-chair by an open window, smoking his pipe, and reading *The Pickwick Papers*.

The room in which his wife's secretary vigorously tapped the keys of a clattering typewriter was on the other side of the house. As he himself said of the library, "One might almost imagine oneself to be living in the country," so little did the incessant activities of Mrs. Townley molest its tranquil air. "I have retired from business," he would say; "but my wife is not of a retiring nature. She will never stop working. It would kill her if she did; for she has not yet learnt the difficult art of idleness."

He was conscious as he read of many sounds, but none was disturbing, for all were melodious; even a lawn-mower, he said, has a soothing charm for the ear of an old gentleman who has earned the right of taking things easily. As for the song of thrushes and blackbirds, Mr. Townley would sometimes lower his book, and even pull off his spectacles, to listen to such extremely fine performances, smiling to himself with great pleasure, and occasionally saying, "Come, that must be an uncommonly fine fellow—a regular Sims Reeves, and no mistake."

As for the robins which hopped from the lawn to the gravel-path, and from the gravel-path to the sills of his French windows, Mr. Townley was so fond of them that he called them his "cheeky little friends," and encouraged them to enter the room. This he did by dropping crumbs at his feet from a piece of bread in his pocket, which he had purloined from the dining-room at breakfast or luncheon unknown to his wife.

He had read the novels of Charles Dickens once before, but that was in the days of his nonage; he was now fulfilling one of the ambitions of his honourable and useful long life in reading them a second time, and reading them with a pondering slowness. "If ever I am lucky enough to retire,"

he had said long ago, "I shall read Dickens right through, beginning with Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller." His idea was to get something out of Dickens which he had missed in his youth, and which, so he hoped, he was now more fitted to receive. "I haven't my wife's talent for books of devotion," he used to say; "but I like to think that I may derive a certain amount of preparation for the next world by sunning myself in the genius of Dickens." His theory of life was the simple one that we are here to do our duty and to practise as much loving-kindness as possible, without making fools of ourselves. Dickens, he held, had a mellowing effect on the human heart—that particularly hard and self-centred detail of man's physical apparatus.

He was disturbed on this occasion by a visit from Mr. Samuel Kopstein. Somewhat unwillingly he laid down his book, saying to himself, "Come, it's nothing but Sam this afternoon; Samuel Pickwick, Samuel Weller, and Samuel Kopstein."

"I am disturbing you?" inquired Mr. Kopstein, who was short, round-shouldered, and bow-legged. "I can see I have put you out. Oh, my dear friend, I am so sorry. But I will not keep you long. Just a few minutes. Business."

"Have a cigar?" said Mr. Townley, and opened the box. He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "I am expecting my grandchild in a few minutes," he said. "She is coming on a visit to us."

"Ah, the Lady Annabel! You must be happy. I know how you love that child. Ah, dear! That her father should be killed! What a tragedy! These wars are dreadful things. Money and life! What a waste, what a waste!"

When he was seated, with his knees wide apart and his feet close together, he came straight to the object of his call.

"I have come, my dear friend," he said, taking the cigar from his mouth and critically scrutinising the burning end through his thick eyeglasses, "to tell you something which is unpleasant." He was seated on an upright chair, close to the arm-chair in which Mr. Townley was once more placidly pulling at his pipe. "I will come to the point. Sir Anthony Holton is a damn scoundrel. You agree? But do you know what he has done? Ah, I will tell you. He has ab-so-lute-ly *ruined—ruined*—those two dear old ladies, those two sweet old English ladies—oh, such lovely souls, so characteristic of our lovely country—for I too am British now—the Misses Dinsdale. He has ruined them, my dear sir—robbed them

of every penny piece, and—done a bunk.” He put his cigar in his mouth and smoked furiously.

Mr. Townley’s face was grave. “I am very sorry to hear it,” he said slowly, sadly, sternly; “very sorry indeed.”

“Many more he has ruined, too,” continued Mr. Kopstein, blowing out a great cloud of tobacco; “and one of them is Lady Theresa.”

“Ah!”

“Every penny piece; every cent. My God, that man has no mercy!”

“Curious,” said Mr. Townley, “how these fellows can get money out of clergymen and women. It’s a knack, I suppose.”

“Not at all, not at all. I can explain. It’s perfectly simple. Oh, yes! My dear sir, you and I could get money out of anyone if we only promised enough. That is the trick. Five per cent.? Ten per cent.? No! But one hundred per cent. Two hundred per cent. Yes, all the time.”

“That’s true. They are, these gentry, the Radicals of the financial world. Still, there’s a trick in it. There’s some little gift in the matter. However—— Poor Catherine! Poor Louisa! Dear me, dear me! I am very sorry to hear this news—very sorry indeed.”

“We must do something, my friend.”

“Yes, certainly.”

“It is unthinkable that those two dear old ladies, so English, so simple, so good—ah, so, so charming—should lose their little house, and all those pretty old things they are so proud of. Ah, no! My wife said to me, ‘They shall never leave their home, those old ladies, not if I have to sell my diamonds, they shan’t.’ That was what my wife said to me.”

“That was very kind of her—very kind indeed.”

Mr. Kopstein looked right and left of him in despair of expressing his feelings about his wife, and burst out, “Ah, my dear friend, she has a heart as large as the British Empire. She is wonderful, that woman. Truly, I do not know another like her. I say to her, ‘And will you also keep Lady Theresa?’ She replied, ‘I will help her, but I could not run to her.’ Ah, she is prudent as well! Lady Theresa would be very expensive. My God, she would be that! But she has friends. She has sons and daughters. I do not worry about her. Altogether I do not like that Lady Theresa. My wife says I do not understand her. I don’t, that is very true. No!

And I don't want to understand her. But the Misses Dinsdale—those two dear old ladies——”

“I agree with you. We need not trouble our heads about Lady Theresa.”

“Ah, not a moment. But these two old ladies, these delightful old ladies, with their little home, all so pretty and neat, and their pretty things all about them.”

“They know, of course?”

“Yes. Too well, too well, poor old ladies.”

“How do they take it?”

“Well, you know them! How would they take it? One says Sir Anthony has deceived them; the other says Sir Anthony meant well towards them, but the markets have deceived him. Then one says, ‘His father was such a gentleman.’ And the other says, ‘His mother was such a dear.’ Then one says, ‘He has sadly disappointed us.’ And the other says, ‘But he cannot be all bad, because he was such a dear little boy.’”

Mr. Townley shook his head over his pipe, examining the ashes in the bowl. “It’s a pity that some children grow up, isn’t it?” he said, and once more shook his old head very sadly.

“Ah, my friend, is there a man, or is there a woman, who was not better before they grew up?”

Mr. Townley this time nodded his old head.

“I doubt it. I really do. If I had been the Almighty—I say it with reverence—I should have very materially abbreviated that three score years and ten. I think I should have knocked off the three score. Dear me, dear me! Yes, I can see how Catherine would take it, and how Louisa would take it. I’ll drive over to-morrow. Perhaps my wife will go this evening when she returns from Durrige. She is bringing Annabel back with her. Yes, Louisa would take it in one way, and Catherine in another. Different temperaments. Mary and Martha. I wonder if that fellow Holton can sleep comfortably. Soft, sinuous, pawing sort of person. But he must be like cast steel inside. What a conscience! I wonder where he has gone.”

“To America.”

“Ah!”

“A blunder, my friend.”

“Why?”

“Why? Because there is not an old maid in that country, or a preacher, or a doctor, who could not see through him—right through him in ten seconds. No, he might as well go

to Scotland. A blunder. He will find it out for himself soon enough."

"Still, you know, a baronet——"

"Ah, my dear sir, America is growing up! There are baronets and baronets. This one is second grade. He is shop soiled. Bah, you see through him in five seconds. The Yankees will size him up in double quick time. He would have married my little Aggie. But I put my foot down. I said to my wife, 'He is after her money, and a man who would marry a woman for her money is the crookedest man on God's earth'; for marriage without love—well, what is it? what is it? what is it?"

They proceeded to discuss how the delicate matter of helping the Misses Dinsdale might be accomplished. Mr. Kopstein was ready to put his hand in his pocket, but wished Mr. Townley to act as the diplomatist of their joint charity. He used the phrase, "We are both good men, but, my friend, I am no fool; you are the greater gentleman."

At the end of their discussion old Mr. Townley said, "We have spent our lives, Kopstein, you and I, in making money. You have made it in one way; I in another. And now we come together to discuss how we can give a part of it away. Tell me, which is the pleasanter process?"

Kopstein replied, "Both are good. There is no mistake about that."

"I agree. But don't you find that it seems to warm you all over when you put your hand in your pocket to help a fellow-creature? They call it charity. I think it's a luxury."

Kopstein got up. "Let me shake that kind hand. I bow my head to a noble sentiment. Townley, my friend, you have not yet retired from the true business of human life. My God, England is full of loving people. She is the land of freedom, and the land of love. I have chosen her for my country. You could not help being an Englishman; but I might have been a German, a Frenchman, an American. Therefore I am the better Englishman. Ha, ha! I have chosen to be an Englishman." He smote his chest, and sent cigar-ash sprinkling over his waistcoat.

The door opened as naturally and simply as if a grown-up was entering the room, and in walked Annabel. She had the composure and dignity of a bishop. On seeing Mr. Kopstein she hesitated for a moment, but came on immediately, taking her long and easy stride, and with no smile of self-consciousness on her little sunburned face.

"How do you do, grandpapa?" she said, extending her hand, which was quite as brown as her face. Then she raised her cheek to be kissed, and added, "I am so glad to come to stay with you. Thank you so much for asking me. Mother sends her best love."

She turned round, looked at Mr. Kopstein, and put out her hand. "How do you do?" she said, more distantly.

"All the better," he said, stooping to kiss her hand, "for seeing your ladyship. Yes, I assure you. Much better."

Her eyes rested on him doubtfully for a moment, and then she turned to Mr. Townley. "How are the robins, grandpapa? We'll feed them after tea, won't we? And, please, I'm longing to see the pony grandmamma has got for me. She says I can jump it over an elm that has fallen down in one of the fields. Will you come too? I want to be with you all the time I'm here."

II

ON her way to visit the Misses Dinsdale, Mrs. Townley thought of Lady Theresa Grantham. She had always known that God's judgment, sooner or later, would fall upon that wicked old woman; but she had never imagined that heaven's wrath would take this particular form. She had pictured to herself a paralytic stroke, the shocking and scandalous divorce of some of Lady Theresa's daughters, or a terribly sudden death in the midst of an orgy of oysters. But how wonderfully exact were the retributions of God. To lose all her money, everything she possessed—how that must hurt, infuriate, and perhaps even break, the heart of this miserly old pagan.

Mr. Townley had no such solemn thoughts as he walked in the grounds of Cumberfield with his granddaughter. He was, indeed, so entirely happy in the society of this delightful child that he had even forgotten the scoundrelism of Sir Anthony Holton and the ruin of the Misses Dinsdale. Perhaps he was beginning to suffer from softening of the brain. An old gentleman who can take off his spectacles to listen to a thrush, or who can find pleasure in getting robins to enter his room, and who can regard the reading of Charles Dickens as a seemly preparation for the mysteries of heaven, may justly be regarded with grave suspicion by rational people.

"Now, if I am not greatly mistaken, Annabel, we may expect to find Adam somewhere between the lavender and the valerian along this border."

"Where does Eve live?" she asked.

"She divides her affections," he replied, "between the aubretia, alyssum, and arabis of that herbaceous border over there, and the campanula muralis at the end of the garden. She is a better walker than Adam. She is freer on her feet, and carries less weight. Adam gets more and more slow, with a slight suggestion of gout in his gait."

"But he climbs up rocks better than she does."

"Well, we have never seen her attempt any gymnastics of that kind. Perhaps she regards rock-climbing as unladylike."

Annabel suddenly seized her grandfather's hand, held him back, and pointed to a group of yellow lupins. There, moving slowly and lumberingly over the earth, was a handsome tortoise, whose sprawling legs rather suggested that a baby elephant was carrying the helmet of Mercury through a jungle. This was Adam.

"Did I tell you that poor old Roscoe—you remember her, don't you?—she was a very good woman, and nursed your mother when she was a baby; ah, and what a lovely little baby she was too!—well, as I was saying, Roscoe came to me one day, very excited, and said, 'The porpoises are out in the meadow!' I couldn't think what she meant, you know. Porpoises in a meadow! I stared at her, and she——"

"She meant tortoises," said Annabel.

"She did, my dear, she did."

"Grandpapa, you don't think it would be unladylike of Eve to climb over the rocks in the rock-garden, do you?"

"No, my dear, I don't. Of course, I'm very old-fashioned. I like ladies to be ladies. I don't like them to be men. But then, you know, Annabel, I don't like men to be ladylike."

"I should think not, grandpapa! I wish you'd tell mother that. I think she'll spoil George if she doesn't look out."

"Oh, surely not, my dear. Why, how old is George? He's only just over six, isn't he? It's early to judge yet."

"He got me into trouble last week. I was put to bed for it."

"Oh, dear; oh, dear! I'm sorry to hear that. Let us go and look for Eve. Well, you were put to bed last week?"

Annabel related that she was trying to teach Elizabeth and Mary how to ride her pony, and that as George, who had strayed away from his nurses, had been looking on for a long time, she thought it would be only kind to give him a turn. So she lifted him up and put him on the pony's back. But

immediately, although she was holding him all the time, he began to scream and to roar.

"I took him off," she said, "and directly he was on the ground he started to run to Larter and Creasey, who were sitting under a tree with their workbaskets. He was bawling like mad. They jumped up, but before he could reach them he caught his foot in a tussock of grass and fell flat on his face. That made him yell and kick worse than ever. He nearly had a fit."

"Oh, dear; oh, dear!"

"Mother gave me a terrible lecture. It made my head spin. Then she sent me to bed. It was only three o'clock; and I don't go to bed now till eight, because I'm twelve."

"Poor child, poor child! These things are very distressing. Yes, I remember being sent to bed. First the slipper, and then the bed. The slipper didn't hurt half so much as the bed."

"Were you ever whipped, grandpapa?"

"I was, dear, I was. Yes, I'm sorry to say, I was. More than once."

"What was it for?"

"I rather think, Annabel, I used to steal sugar out of the sideboard. I'm afraid I did."

"But did you own up?"

"I think I was usually caught red-handed."

"But you never told a lie?"

"I don't think so."

Annabel would have much preferred a more emphatic denial. She changed the subject.

She was eminently the head of the family at Durridge. Nature had so fashioned her heart that she never had to wrestle with a fear or to hold colloquies with a misgiving. She loved climbing trees, mounting high ladders, sliding down tall haystacks, jumping her pony over formidable obstacles, and springing from the bank of the river on to uneven or precipitous rocks in the midst of its swirling current. But these things, and many others of a like character, she did with a high seriousness, never as a mere expression of laughter. It was with her, not a case of skylarking or of showing off, but of measuring her strength against difficult things, and putting her will against any of the intimidations of life which presented themselves to her eyes in the form of a challenge.

"George says," she began, after they had found Eve, "that he likes being nursed by Larter. He's always in her lap. I took him one of his toys one day, when he was being

nursed by her, and he threw it on the ground. He doesn't like playing games, and he likes indoors better than outdoors. I wish I had been born a boy, and George had been a girl. I'm sure my father would have liked it better."

"You would have made a splendid boy, Annabel; there's no doubt of that; and I think you would have made a splendid duke. But I like you as you are. Let me tell you that. Yes, I like you very much as a girl."

"I want to help George," said Annabel; "but he won't let me. I do help Elizabeth and Mary. They're not very brave, but I think they try to be, and, anyway, they don't cry when they fall or cut themselves. But George won't try to do anything. He's a regular baby still, and he's over six, grandpapa."

"Well, let us watch him carefully, Annabel, and see what we can do. It's a little early yet, perhaps. Six is not a great age. By the time he's eight or nine we ought to know how he is going to turn out."

Annabel quoted her greatest friend at Durridge, the stud groom. "Stockley says that he can tell how a foal is going to shape when it's only a week old, and that he knows a bad one an hour after it's born."

Mr. Townley shook his head over this information. "We must be a little bit careful, Annabel, my dear, about forming hasty judgments. I think so, I think so. It's rather a dangerous habit, my dear. I'm inclined to think that only very conceited and boastful people lay down the law. And, as my father used to say, it's not always the boy who wins the prizes at school who sets the Thames on fire. George may turn out a fine fellow. We can't tell. We must hope that he will. In any case, he's an uncommonly lucky little beast to have you for a sister. That's quite clear. You'll be able to help him famously when he's more used to the feel of the earth under his feet. We'll have him over here, and you and I together will keep an eye on him."

Annabel said, with just a touch of bitterness in her voice, "I don't think mother would ever let him pay a visit. She can't bear to have him out of her sight."

Mr. Townley noticed her tone of bitterness. It gave him an uneasy feeling. How much greater had been his distress if he had heard Annabel's answer to a question of Elizabeth and Mary concerning their brother. "Do you hate George?" they had asked her. Annabel raised her eyebrows, weighed the question, and replied, "Sometimes."

III

WITH numerous books open before him, and writing with extreme slowness, Aylmer Montgomery sat in the window of his sitting-room in Hertford Street composing the biography of a statesman recently deceased.

This work, which was to occupy only a few columns in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, had set him thinking of his own life. He had failed to make a mark in the House of Commons, and had failed to keep his seat at the last election. The articles which he occasionally contributed to the *Fortnightly Review* appeared to make no impression on the minds of his contemporaries. Undoubtedly there was something in his personality which militated against vulgar success. He could justly reflect on the high opinion entertained for his scholarship at Oxford, and he could as justly claim that many eminent members of the Athenæum regarded him with manifest respect. But, somehow or another, among second-rate and practical people—if they really were practical, which he took leave to doubt—he seemed to make no impression at all.

It reached his ears in his last session of Parliament that a member of the Cabinet had proposed his name for an under-secretaryship, but that the Prime Minister, on learning that he was not popular with the party, had immediately vetoed the suggestion, selecting for the place a mediocre young man who was regarded on both sides of the House as "a good fellow, with no damned nonsense about him."

To say that Aylmer was sore about this failure of his as a politician would be to exaggerate. The truer word would be that he was bewildered. He could not understand why the House of Commons should form an estimate of his character so entirely different from his own, and why his reputation in the party should be so contradictorily different from his reputation at Oxford.

At the same time he did very often ask himself whether there was not in his personality some mysterious element, on which he could not quite perfectly focus the lens of introspection, which prejudiced the average man against him.

This was his mood when the door opened, and the man who kept the House in Hertford Street presented him with a letter on a salver, a letter which had been sent by hand. He recognised the writing at once, and started at the thought that Isabel was in London.

"The messenger is waiting for an answer, sir."

He opened the letter, which came from Claridge's Hotel, and read :

"DEAR AYLMEER,—I am in London for a day or two, to see what I can do in this wretched business of my aunt, Theresa Grantham. If you are not engaged, or too busy, will you come to tea this afternoon? It will be very nice to see you again.

"Yours sincerely,

"ISABEL ROTHBURY."

When he had sent his acceptance of this invitation he shut up his books, put away his papers, and began to walk slowly up and down the room, thinking in a direction which was not altogether different from that which had occupied his thoughts before the letter arrived.

With much more earnestness did his thoughts pursue this direction when he was seated with Isabel at a little tea-table in Claridge's. How competent she was; how direct; and how distinguished and beautiful.

It was a pleasure of the keenest kind to see her again, and again to hear her melodious voice. It was also delightful to feel how naturally they resumed the relationship of old and intimate friends.

When she had told him that Lady Theresa Grantham was consulting one solicitor after another in her passionate determination to avenge herself on Sir Anthony Holton, and could not be made to realise either that she had lost her money by her own act or that she now had no money wherewith to employ lawyers and private detectives—when Isabel had told him this she changed the conversation to DurrIDGE, and presently centred it on George.

"I am rather worried about him," she said. "He is not so strong as the others. Annabel, of course, is more like a boy than a girl; but Elizabeth and Mary are rather fragile little things, and yet they seem to have more—what shall I say?—more animation, more vitality, than George. I am going to take Aunt Theresa back with me for a week or two, and I should very much like you to come too, if you can manage it. Mr. Finch is coming as well. I should like, Aylmer, to get your opinion of George. I am hoping, indeed, that later on you may be kind enough to help me in the matter of his education. You see, I want him to be a great personage. I am consecrating my whole life to that end."

Aylmer asked several wise questions, and while Isabel answered them he thought to himself, "A woman is at her best at this age. Beauty has done with prettiness, and is busy with dignity, with grandeur. To look at Isabel is to believe that personality survives death. Moreover, her mind has suffered no damage from wrong affections. She has never cared for trivial things. She has never lost any of her freshness in the heated race of a London season. She is clever and distinguished. She is extremely interesting. How cool she looks! How beautiful is the sheen of her skin! How clear and brilliant her eyes! One could be perfectly happy with such a woman, whether one's ambition misfired or not."

"You are looking extremely well, Isabel," he said aloud. "Indeed, I do not know that I have ever seen you look so well."

"Ah, Aylmer, if only I might give some of my health to George!"

IV

ISABEL paid several visits to Theresa Grantham, and in going between Brook Street and Wilton Crescent studied London with the eye of a trained observer. She was not familiar with the capital, and very often could not tell what street it was through which she was driving; so that what the *habitué* scarcely saw at all Isabel saw with striking clearness, and also in such a bright light of freshness that she was never bored for a moment, and, generally speaking, was greatly entertained.

She quite saw how it was that people lost their hearts to London. It was really a most endearing city. At one moment she was in a great flood of quickly moving and cheerful-looking vehicles, with shops right and left of her, and with crowds of pedestrians on the pavements or waiting at street corners; at the next she was in a little backwater of Georgian houses, where a one-horsed brougham waited at a door, or an old top-hatted gentleman walked beside a tall and elegant woman whose sunshade quite lighted up the street. She was enchanted by some of these little backwaters, and found herself not only admiring the lanterns and porticoes over the doors, and the trim look of style and simplicity in the architecture, but speculating as to who lived in these houses, and the manner of their lives.

There was certainly much to be said for London. Conversation would surely be in an altogether higher key than the

conversation of counties and shires devoted chiefly to sport and agriculture. In a single afternoon one might meet many men whose names were world-famous—politicians, explorers, authors, musicians, painters, sculptors, and perhaps even great actors. It must be pleasant—very pleasant—to meet such men in a beautiful drawing-room, with only a few other people gathered round a tea-table, and to hear how they talked in private. She felt, too, that she would like to meet in this same intimate fashion some of the great beauties of society, who were as famous for their taste in dress as for the wit and brilliance of their conversation. But in the case of this wish she was conscious of a certain amount of trepidation. One must be trained, she felt, in the manners of a great social world not to make oneself appear rather provincial in the eyes of such haughty and brilliant women.

It was like an invitation to prolong her stay in London when she returned to her hotel on the day after she had talked to Mr. Montgomery and found a great sheaf of beautiful flowers in her rooms, with Aylmer's card attached to them. How charming of him to have thought of such a thing! Men in London evidently learned how a woman likes to be treated. She had the feeling that life was no longer wholly a stern business, made of great responsibilities and exhausting duties. There was room for leisure, playfulness, charm, for living as if life itself were an art.

Arthur Hawthorpe came to see her. He was full of talk about his children. He had married Lavinia Charlecote a year after Isabel's engagement to Herbert, and, as she was a veritable Diana in the hunting-field and an incomparable Juno in the drawing-room, he was supremely content with married life. But it was of his children he talked to Isabel. Dicky, his eldest son, promised to carry on the traditions of Glantingham in a noble fashion. The little chap was fearless to hounds, a good shot with his air-gun, and never so happy as when he was in the harness-room or the stables. As for little Jenny, she was the joy of the whole household—so demure, so gentle, and as beautiful as an angel. When would Isabel pay another visit to Glantingham? Lavinia was devoted to her. Why not stop at Glantingham on her way back to DurrIDGE?

Isabel's love for London was not shaken by this visit, which seemed to bring the happy life of the shires into Claridge's. She had discovered in herself a passion for streets. She paid several visits to shops, and bought a number of

presents for the children, for her mother and father, for Miss Trevelyan, the governess, and for the nurses. She also bought many hats for herself, and three or four dresses.

Over and over again she compared the quickness and alertness of Londoners, their general air of brisk and cheerful activity, with the grudging movements and laborious faces of the labourers at Durridge. It was a pleasure to move through these crowded streets and to visit these brilliant shops. There was something tonic about London. Its water was said to be the purest in the world, and perhaps its air was as good as a voyage across the Atlantic.

Mr. Robert Finch, who also sent her flowers, took Isabel for drives in the Park, gave a little dinner-party in her honour, and on the last night of her stay in London took her to a theatre. He was not a cheerful companion; in fact, he was more than ever like a "chief mourner," for he would continually talk of old friends of his who were now dead; all the same, Isabel liked to drive about London with him in his little brougham, and, indeed, learned from him many things which she found useful.

"I rather wanted to go to —," she would say, mentioning a famous dressmaker in Regent Street.

"Oh, my dear duchess," he would reply, "on no account—on no account. Let me drive you to —," naming a French firm of which she had never heard, and a firm which occupied, as she found to her astonishment, a private house in one of the lesser streets of the town. On his way thither he would tell her how Lady This and Lady That always bought their dresses from this particular firm, and how a procession of its mannequins in the latest models from Paris was now one of the sights of the London season. He drove her to Sloane Street for her gloves, to South Audley Street for her handkerchiefs, to a shop at the top of Regent Street, the name of which she had never heard, for her silk stockings, and to Conduit Street for her shoes.

"I have spent my life," he would say, heaving a great sigh, "in being useful to beautiful and gracious women. It is wonderful, my dear duchess, wonderful, I assure you, what sweet memories a gracious woman can leave in a man's soul. I know it is considered *démodé* nowadays to speak of the soul; but I have never surrendered to Darwin, and I hope I never shall. I do not believe we are descended from apes. I believe what the Bible says—that we are made in the image of God. In any case, some part of me, call it my brain, my

mind, or my heart—I prefer to call it my soul—is full of exquisite memories, and almost every one of those memories was lodged there by the vanished hand, or the voice that is still, of a beautiful woman.”

He spoke to her of the Ascots and Goodwoods of the 'eighties ; of gala nights at the Opera in those most splendid days ; of the great dinner-parties and receptions at Grosvenor House, Stafford House, Dorchester House, Spencer House, Devonshire House ; of visits to Newmarket and Cowes ; of the beauty of Lady de Grey, Lady Dudley, Mrs. Langtry, and Lady Randolph Churchill ; of his dear old friend Harriet Wantage, and of “that noble and lovely Constance Westminster.”

It was endless, his catalogue of memories. “And yet, duchess, I assure you I can now walk from Berkeley Square, through Hill Street and Green Street, and across Park Lane to the Achilles Statue, without meeting a soul who knows me ! That is the tragedy of growing old. I have nothing left to me now but my little bits of furniture and my few pieces of china. Nothing at all. Ah, by the way, sorry as I am for my old friend Theresa, I shall never be able to forgive her for having sold those two powder-blue vases without giving me the opportunity of buying them. After all my kindnesses to her, endless and expensive kindnesses—however, it is not becoming to speak of such matters.”

Isabel was a little bored by these reminiscences of old Mr. Finch, but she was grateful to him for introducing her to much knowledge of London which enabled her to feel that she was living at the very centre of civilisation.

V

THE Duke of Rothbury was in every way a disappointing child. He was small and pale. He was listless and dull. He did really seem to prefer, as Annabel had told her grandfather, the lap of his nurse to the fields, the woods, and the river of DurrIDGE. The doctor assured Isabel that the boy was perfectly sound, and that she need entertain no misgivings about his health. But Isabel never ceased to worry about him, and was for ever cautioning Larter concerning his food, and for ever studying books which dealt with the subject of domestic hygiene.

As Lady Theresa and Mr. Robert Finch were perfectly satisfied to be wrangling together in one of the rooms of

Durridge, Isabel and Aylmer found themselves very often alone, with no one to interrupt their conversations about George.

One day, while Lady Theresa was inveighing against the whole system of English law, and pronouncing every counsel and solicitor in the country to be a dishonest scoundrel; and while Mr. Finch was triumphantly and yet mournfully repeating the challenge that infuriated her more than anything else—"Produce a single document, my dear but foolish Theresa, to prove that Sir Anthony promised to give you back your money"—while this duel was proceeding in a morning-room, Isabel and Aylmer were walking in the garden and talking about George.

"You feel with me, don't you, Aylmer, that his life may make a difference to England, and therefore that no pains ought to be spared in bringing him up with the utmost care?"

"I do. In fact, I am so interested in the child that I should like, if you will let me, to share both your labours and your anxieties."

"How kind of you, Aylmer. I call that most handsome of you. Do you really feel such an interest in George?"

She was so surprised by his suggestion that she turned her face to look at him. What was her astonishment to find the pale and poetic Aylmer blushing like a girl.

"I am extremely interested in George," he replied; "but I am even more interested in you, Isabel."

She knew now what was coming. Between pleasure and indignation she did not know how to handle the situation. It was, of course, delightful to feel that one was still— But he was Herbert's friend; he had known Herbert intimately. How could he bring himself to think—

"You don't mind my saying so?" he asked.

"No, Aylmer."

The tone might have told him her answer, but he was foolish enough to think that she was coquetting with him.

"I have always felt," he said, "that you are marvellously different from other women."

She could not stop him now. She must certainly hear how she was different from other women.

"Beauty must be such a terrible temptation," he went on. "I suppose that the mere vanity it induces has corrupted the hearts of more women than all the sins in the decalogue. Vanity, of course, is a serious thing; it is one of the belittling weaknesses of human nature. But you, Isabel, appear to be wholly unaware of your beauty. You do not seem even to

wear it as a flower. It is as if you had never looked in a glass, or given a moment's thought to your appearance. Your beauty, if I may say so, is the most unconscious thing about you. You are, I think, conscious of your intellect, and rightly and necessarily conscious; but you have never given me the feeling that you realise in the least how extremely beautiful you are."

"Dear Aylmer," she said, uttering a little difficult laugh, "I beg you not to corrupt my nature with that belittling weakness of human nature of which you were just speaking. How dreadful to be vain! How stupid to give a thought to one's looks! Shall we go and join the children? George looks dreadfully small beside Annabel, doesn't he?"

He thought to himself, "I have bungled the matter. Either that, or she does not care for me. I don't think I can have bungled it. I consider that my approach was delicacy itself. I am afraid she does not care for me in that way."

Now, something very important came of this tentative approach to the affections of Isabel on the part of Aylmer Montgomery, for it chanced that, when they reached the children, George had strayed some distance from Annabel, and that Annabel heard what her mother said to Aylmer.

Isabel said: "Dear Herbert had an idea that a boy of George's rank should play with the village children, and grow up with the friendship of miners and quarrymen. I forget whether he talked to me about it, or whether he wrote to me about it after George's birth; but that, I know, was his idea. What do you think was in his mind exactly?"

"One sees what he meant," replied Aylmer. "He believed, you remember, in the influence of nature. He had no feeling at all for the artificial side of civilisation. But, of course, in the case of a boy like George his theory is impossible."

"You think so?"

"The child is too fragile."

"Alas, that he should be!"

"I don't mean in health."

"But he is delicate, isn't he? He looks as if a breath of wind might blow him away."

"I meant spiritually. He is sensitiveness itself. There is nothing of the ploughboy or the jockey about George. He is fashioned for far higher ends."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that."

They walked on. Annabel remained where she was, sitting on the grass, her feet wide apart, her hat in her lap.

This overheard conversation haunted her for several days. She thought about it in bed, when she was going off to sleep ; she woke with it in her mind. She often looked at George during those days with a new interest. She showed him certain kindnesses. One Sunday, when they were rather late in their preparations for church, she fetched George's hat for him and helped him to fasten a difficult button.

At last she knew. The discovery of her father's secret thrilled her with the sense of a mission. Isabel, dreaming of George's triumphant career, was not nearly so thrilled as Annabel, pondering her father's wish and deciding that she would strive to fulfil it.

When George was nearly seven years of age the two children were alone one day in the garden. "What do you like doing best?" Annabel asked.

"I don't know," said George.

"You don't like animals?" she asked.

"No. I hate them. I think they're beastly things."

"Do you like people?"

"No."

"I like some people," said Annabel. "I like Stockley tremendously. But I don't like lots of others. Do you like outdoors or indoors best?"

George thought for some time. The question evidently puzzled him. At last he said, "I like the woods. The woods are pretty."

"Flowers are pretty," corrected Annabel; "woods are more than pretty."

George suddenly looked up at her. "Do you believe in fairies?" he asked.

Annabel shrugged her square shoulders. "I don't know."

George walked away with his head down, and then, turning about, said that he liked reading about fairies and liked looking for them.

Annabel said, "Father never looked for fairies."

She was breathing hard, and did not glance at George, but over his head to the woods and the hills.

"Did he tell you?" asked George, looking up at her eagerly.

"I know what father wanted you to be," said Annabel.

"I like looking for fairies, but I don't like being afraid of giants," said George. "Giants frighten me when I'm in bed. Are you frightened of ogres and witches?"

"Father was not frightened of anything," said Annabel.

"He was too proud to be frightened. All the people loved

father because he was brave. Father wanted you to be brave. When you haven't got nurses you will be brave. When you go to school——"

"I don't want to go to school."

"But you'll have to."

"No; because I've made mother promise me."

"Don't you want to grow up a brave man?"

"I don't want to grow up at all, and I simply *hate* schools. I won't go to school. If they sent me I'd—I'd run away."

Annabel said, "I hope father can't hear what you say."

George looked up at her with fear in his eyes. "Father's dead." Then, half shyly, half fearfully, "Do you believe in ghosts?"

"If he can hear you he'll be very sad. He wanted you to—to—— Well, he hoped you wouldn't like being looked after by nurses."

"I must have nurses."

"Yes, but you needn't like them."

"I love Nanny," said George, almost as if he would tell her that Annabel did *not* love her.

"So do I; at least, I like her; but I don't like being looked after and followed about. I'm like father; I like doing things for myself. He thought women could spoil boys. I know he did. He thought boys ought to be brought up by men."

"I like women more than men. I don't like men."

Annabel fired her last shot. "If you want to please father," she said, with a ring in her voice, "you will try to be a real man. You ought to, for his sake. Besides, you can't be a real duke if you like being messed about by nurses. You ought to try to grow out of that, and if father was here he would show you how to do it. I know how to do it. I found out for myself, because I used to go walks with father. I know how to be a real man."

George appeared to have no desire for Annabel's information, and future attempts on her part to discharge her mission were interrupted by Mr. Aylmer Montgomery's prescription for George's manhood.

He told Isabel that it would be an interesting and perhaps a useful experiment to take George to London. "The child," he said, "is not of a nature to find his destiny in the country. He has none of his father's tastes, and few if any of his tendencies. Here he will live in a daze, and not a very creative daze either. In London his mind, I think, will awaken, and you should be able to see in what direction he is disposed

by nature to move forward. At any rate, I feel sure that in his manhood the country will mean for him only a recreation, and that in London he will find his stage."

This advice endeared its giver in Isabel's eyes. She was now hungering and thirsting for London, and only duty to George had kept her so close a prisoner in Durridge. To take her due place in the world, to use all her powers on the side of virtue and culture—this old desire was now consecrated in her mind by the thought that she would thus be preserving the world for her son and preparing it for his coming.

"My dear Robert," said Lady Theresa, watching them in the garden, "you may bet your bottom dollar——"

"Really, Theresa, your expressions——!"

"Never mind my expressions. You may bet your bottom dollar they'll be married before the year's out."

"Well," said Mr. Finch, "as I am not so used to gambling as you are I shall——"

"You beast!" exclaimed the old woman.

"Never, Theresa, shall I forgive you for selling those powder-blue vases—never, never."

As he pronounced this word *never* for a second time a curious change came over the face of Mr. Finch. It became suddenly purple, and the eyes looked for a moment like coals of fire. Lady Theresa uttered a scream, struggled to her feet with appalling difficulty, cast one horrified glance at Mr. Finch, and began beating on the window with her hands.

Aylmer hurried forward, and reached the window some minutes before Isabel.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Lady Theresa pointed to the enormous body of Robert Finch, which had collapsed in its chair.

"He's had a fit. My God, my God! I ought not to have seen it! A fit! Isabel, you must get me upstairs. Send for a doctor. I must have brandy. He went blue. All of a sudden. I never saw such a thing. Oh, my God!"

But Aylmer, having got through the window, knew that it was not a fit, and realised that Mr. Finch had joined his old friends at last.

VI

WHEN Isabel arrived in London, and took possession of the house in Belgrave Square which had been unoccupied by a Stretton for nearly twenty years, there was a strong movement

in the high places of society against the reigning Government, a Liberal administration which was said to be captured by the Radicals and animated by principles entirely destructive of the British Empire.

She found herself, during the early weeks of her residence in London, drawn into a strong tide of Conservative feeling, and it seemed to her that the aristocracy was of one mind and almost of one body. But presently she became aware of other currents. There was a section of aristocracy committed to what is now called the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Church of England, and another section equally committed to the evangelical movement. In cultivating the friendship of this latter section she discovered that there were other movements in society—a movement, for example, against the Jews, another movement against the Germans, and another movement against the Roman Catholics.

For some little time she was almost bewildered by the clash of contrary opinions which met her at every turn of her way, but gradually her clear head, and her inherited ideas, enabled her to make decisions which, while they tended to narrow the circle of her acquaintance, at least delivered her from the exhaustion of always being on her guard as to what she said in the presence of particular people. She made a choice between people who called the Almighty "Gud" and those who called Him "Gawd." In thus becoming a figure in the evangelical section of society she found herself marshalled with those several legions which regarded the Jews with suspicion, the Germans with fear, and the Roman Catholics with hatred.

She was grieved to lose the friendship of certain families which from the days of the Tractarians had cherished the Anglo-Catholic tradition, particularly as she had found these people to be singularly gracious, whole-heartedly on the side of good, and extremely interesting. She could not hide from herself the knowledge that many of her evangelical friends were frumpish and dull, and that there was as much bigotry and even malignity mixed up in the opinions of some of them as a clean, beautiful, and disinterested love of good. Moreover, they did not appear to her to be as intellectual as the other set, nor could she discover in many of them a respect for learning or an enthusiasm for any of the arts. They seemed, in Isabel's eyes, to be occupied chiefly in looking out for people to disagree with, and when those people were found they did not so much attack them as tell stories or repeat gossip about them behind their backs.

Still, these frumpish old families realised that the Jews were a menace to England, saw clearly that the wicked Germans intended to destroy British trade, and possessed evidence sufficient to convince any reasonable and unprejudiced person that the Roman Catholics were permeating every department of the national life with the destructive poison of Jesuitism. How could Isabel delay her decision? She might wish that her evangelical friends were more interesting and more definitely abreast of fashion; she might nurse the dream of one day bringing the most delightful Anglo-Catholic families to see the sacred character of evangelical piety; but for her, being an honest person and a serious person, the choice was inevitable and could not be delayed.

Among her most intimate friends was the Countess of Skipton, a tall and matronly woman whose bulbous eyes and wrinkled skin inspired certain people to dub her "The Queen of Frogs." Notable for an engaging frankness of manner, Lady Skipton combined with an unquestionable probity of heart a devouring curiosity for inside information concerning her chief enemies—the Anglo-Catholics, the Christian Scientists, the Jews, the Germans, and the Smart Set. She registered information on these heads with a fervour which the Recording Angel certainly did not experience in the case of Uncle Toby's oath, and perhaps never quite feels in jotting down the crimes of the very worst of us. In collecting and making use of this information she was convinced, and with good reason for the conviction, that she was protecting England from influences which were fatal to her freedom and prosperity.

Isabel and Lilian Skipton were soon like two sisters, calling each other "my dear," entering each other's house at unusual hours, and consulting each other about their children, their servants, their dresses, their dinner-parties, and their friends. Lady Skipton was older, more downright, more experienced, and more capable; but Isabel was far more beautiful and far more cultivated, and, with so powerful a person as Lady Skipton, was tractable enough to endear her in the older woman's eyes.

"But, after all," Lady Skipton said to her one day, "I am not sure, my dear, whether we ought not to shut our eyes to the machinations of the Roman Catholics and the Jews, and concentrate all our powers on attacking the fast people who are ruining society and giving a handle to the most

dangerous elements in the Radical camp to stir up the working-classes against the social order."

"Is it really true," asked Isabel, "that Mrs. Ossett smokes cigarettes in the middle of dinner, allows her children to say blasphemous things, and encourages her husband to take an unhealthy interest in young girls? Is that really true?"

"My dear, it is perfectly true. But she is an upstart. It is only her husband's position that gives her any importance. Let me tell you——"

"What I don't understand," Isabel interrupted, "is the friendship of Mr. Navin for such a woman. After all, he is a Conservative, and a great scholar, and a great gentleman."

"My dear, that is the terrible thing about this generation. Principle counts for nothing. Conservatives fraternise with the most dangerous of Liberals, and laugh over their dinner-tables at the speeches they make in the House of Commons. Mr. Ossett is a drinker, and thoroughly disreputable in other ways. It makes no difference to Mr. Navin. Mr. Ossett is one of the worst enemies of the empire on the Liberal side, but he is a scholar, his wife is supposed to be witty, and everything in their household is a defiance of good manners and an outrage on good taste; and so our Conservative leaders go there to be *amused*—amused and polluted."

"It is very serious," said Isabel; "worse than anything I had imagined; and one feels so powerless to alter it."

"Let me tell you something that is perhaps even more serious, for it shows the depth of degradation to which even the greatest families in the land can sink. Have you met Lady Rowsley? Well, you know about her. The daughter of a duke, and married to one of the oldest earldoms in the country. Will you believe it, she has carried on a guilty liaison for two years with this foreign singer, da Sarza. The other day she received a letter from him breaking it off."

"Oh, how horrible, how humiliating!" exclaimed the astonished Isabel.

"But that is not all. The letter reduced her to tears. The earl entered the room. 'My darling,' he cried, 'what has upset you?' 'Read this cruel letter!' she cried, with her handkerchief to her eyes. He read it, took her into his arms, and comforted her. 'You must realise, my darling,' he said, fondling her, 'that these singers are very much run after; they cannot keep pace with all their admirers; he has treated you odiously, shamefully, but there is some excuse for him; after all, it is really a feather in your cap to have kept

the love of so great a person for two years.' Now that, Isabel, is *absolutely* true. Lord Rowsley himself told my husband's cousin the story."

"But why wasn't he angry, jealous, indignant?" asked the perplexed Isabel. "I don't understand it at all."

"Indignant! How could he be? Why, my dear, she has put up with his infidelities for years and years."

Sometimes, when she thought of things like this, Isabel was tempted to take George into her arms and fly back to the cleanliness and serenity of dear DurrIDGE, as it were from a city stricken with plague and doomed to be destroyed by a thunderbolt from heaven. But there were bright summer mornings when she was very happy driving with her son through the Park, or stopping her carriage before shops that were full of beautiful enticements. She contracted an affection even for the smoky wall of Buckingham Palace's garden, with its *chevaux de frise* and its tree-tops; she loved, too, the great main thoroughfares of London, with their incessant multitudes and their streaming lines of discordant vehicles; she found, also, an unsated pleasure in driving past historic monuments and famous buildings. London might be wicked in places, she told herself, but was it not also a great city, an Imperial city, throbbing with the activity of the human mind, and charged with the destinies of millions of people far across the seas?

It had fallen to Aylmer Montgomery's lot to take George on the child's earliest walks through London. He had arranged with Isabel that the boy's first experience of the great city should take the form of a visit to Westminster Abbey. Aylmer was interested to know what effect that church would make upon the mind of a delicate and sensitive boy brought up in an English park.

He watched his little charge with great closeness as they crossed the square towards the north door of the abbey. The boy was staring at the statues in the square. Aylmer explained to him that these statues were considerable eyesores, and directed him to look at the abbey. It was clear that the building made no impression on his mind. The dwarfed entry, the shabby inner doors, the little stall with guide-books within the dark porch, seemed to disappoint him, almost to annoy him, for Aylmer was conscious of a slight pull of the little hand he was holding in his own, as if the boy did not wish to go any farther.

But when they had opened the swing door and entered the

church, it was quite manifest that it made an instant impression on the boy's mind—probably the impression of surprise. He stood stock still, staring into its dim distance and up to its high roof, his fingers tightening and relaxing in Aylmer's hand.

Aylmer gently led him forward. "These statues," he whispered, "ought not to be here. They spoil the architecture by cramping its space; and, besides, they are very ugly. But they are monuments to men who loved England, and worked for her, and, in many cases, died for her." He told him of Nelson's determination—victory or Westminster Abbey; but the boy did not seem to hear, and was evidently not at all interested in the statues. Aylmer saw that he was still staring into distance.

This wonder of his grew more pronounced when they stood in the centre of the great church. Aylmer felt himself incapable of ministering to an attitude of the spirit at once so simple and so absorbed. He contented himself by pointing to a window or a bust, or indicating an inscription, walking very slowly with the child, himself more vividly impressed by the abbey than ever before in his life.

The beauty of the Henry the Seventh Chapel deepened George's daze. He had been leaning close to Aylmer's side up to this moment, but now he stood farther apart, even loosening his hand, and going a step forward by himself. There he came to a stop, gazing at the loveliness surrounding him, almost peering at it, the head leaning forward—a little timid figure, pale of face, with fine silken hair, grey eyes, and a mouth that was never quite firmly closed; a delicate and fragile child, all nerves and sensibility, turning his cap round and round in his hands.

Aylmer himself was so inspired by the place—the worn stairs, the bronze gates, the rich colours of the crowding banners, the sombre shadows of the carved stalls ascending towards the magnificent dark roof, the simple altar with its four candles and its sense of forsakenness—that he ceased to think about the child, and began to reflect on the poetry of religion and its influence in the civilisation of man's soul. When he did at last turn to George, he saw that the child had gone ahead of him, and was looking up at the tall windows, the light of which made a mist about his hair.

On their way home Aylmer spoke of England, and told George that many people far across the sea, in romantic lands once occupied by Red Indians and Maoris, hung pictures

of Westminster Abbey on their walls, and in their dreams of England thought often of this great abbey church.

"Ours is a country," he said, "that people love, just as you love your mother. If you went away from your mother you would still love her; and that is what happens to English people all over the world. Many of them have never seen England, because they were born in those far countries across the sea, but they always speak of her as Home, and they work hard and save up their money so that one day they may come to London and stand in Westminster Abbey, which is the heart of our great empire. You can understand how men long to work for England, and to make her even greater and stronger than she is, can't you? You feel that she is something beautiful and splendid, something that is holy, like God; something that is greater than the King on his throne, and richer than all the riches of her great cities. DurrIDGE is one aspect of England; Westminster Abbey is another. You know DurrIDGE well, and now you know Westminster Abbey; so you must begin to read history, and to ask questions about England. You see, we want you to serve her when you grow up to be a man."

The boy said nothing for some minutes; at last, pressing Aylmer's hand more firmly, and drawing closer to his side, he said, "But I shan't really have to go away from mother, shall I?"

VII

LORD HAWTHORPE used to say that he dreaded going to Isabel's house because he always departed from it a so much poorer man.

"You arrive on her Grace's doorstep," he complained, "to find an officer of the Salvation Army leaving the house—grinning as he puts on his cap in a way which shows that he has collected a thumping subscription. You are shown into a room where you find Sir John Kirk of the Ragged School Union, Dr. Barnardo, a secretary or two of such societies as those which prevent cruelty to children and cruelty to animals, Mr. Carlile of the Church Army, a group of clericals who are either propagating the gospel or propagating lies about the brewers, and any number of ladies with little bags full of papers who are getting up bazaars for crippled children, maternity homes, and the orphans of policemen. You are rescued from the clutches of these people and conducted to

the library, where you find her Grace taking leave of Sydney Holland, who instantly buttonholes you and extracts a promise from you to visit the London Hospital. It's as if all the vultures in town had discovered a dead mastodon, or as if all the inhabitants of Jewry had hit upon a new Klondyke. I am a poor man, and I cannot afford the duchess's friends, much as I value her Grace's friendship."

Isabel was certainly taking a part of great importance in the life of London. She was now a recognised leader of the Old Guard, who welcomed her, not only for her wealth and public spirit, but also for her beauty and distinction. She was acknowledged on every hand as a great addition to the ranks of those who were preserving the manners of English aristocracy at a time of great moral laxity. As it happened, the intellect of the Conservative party was just then at a painfully low ebb, and the assaults upon the social order by Mr. Lloyd George, who as Chancellor of the Exchequer was constituting himself the champion of the poor, tended, if not to break down, at any rate to lower some of the fences which the various sections of the Old Guard had erected against each other in happier times, so anxious were they now to consolidate their forces and present a united front to the impious enemy.

In this way Isabel's dinner-parties came to be no longer composed solely of the evangelical party. She was able to ask to her house some of the most interesting people among the Anglo-Catholics, and even to make acquaintance with families who took no interest in either of these two clerical parties, so devoted were all their affections to sports and pastimes, particularly to hunting and racing. She did not in any way moderate her zeal in the interest of the evangelicals, or desist from any of her numerous philanthropic activities; but, like so many other members of her order at that time, she completely buried the hatchet of aristocracy's internecine strife, and joined with Papists, Hebrews, and worldlings to defeat the monstrous propaganda of the Radicals.

"I like to think," she told Lady Skipton, "that we shall convert during this political *entente* some at least of the victims of Roman Catholic propaganda."

"I am sure we shall not do that," replied the decided countess; "but it is necessary to carry on a truce with them till we have turned out this detestable Government."

During those days of great and brilliant social activity Aylmer Montgomery acted as tutor to the little duke, who

was not to go to a preparatory school, but was to proceed to Eton in 1914, if his health improved and his mind seemed firm enough for such an experiment. Aylmer, who had slipped into this office of tutor, which he insisted upon regarding as an honorary office, usually stayed to luncheon, and one day he expressed a doubt to Isabel as to her wisdom in adopting what he described as a somewhat reactionary attitude towards the social proposals of the Liberal Government.

"I think," he said, "that the Conservatives, by their abuse of him, are driving Lloyd George to extremes which he himself dislikes and one day will deplore. They are making him out to be a greater man than he really is. He is neither a Danton nor a Robespierre. After all, there are very few proposals in the social reforms of the Liberal party with which the intelligent people in the Conservative party do not agree. Therefore it seems to me that the Conservatives, by this policy of vilification, are not only committing political suicide, but putting into the hands of the revolutionary element in the country a spade with which to bury them."

Isabel replied that she had been thinking a great deal during the last few days of a remark made to her by the old duke. "He was always quoting," she said, "an observation made by the Duke of Wellington about Sir Robert Peel. It was, if I remember rightly, '*There is a gentleman who never saw the end of a campaign.*' He taught me, dear old man, always to look to the end of any projected action; never to be content with a rash step, or anything but contemptuous of opportunism. I am trying to guide my action now by that principle. I think the end of the Budget campaign means the destruction of the social order. I see it as a first step towards mob dictatorship. It isn't so much the proposals of the Liberals that I dislike as the spirit in which they are made. That spirit is surely offensive and disruptive. I feel that we must oppose it. If not, what will happen? The political fate of the Empire will fall into the hands of the urbanised working-classes, who have no experience of government, no knowledge at all of economics, and no enthusiasm, so far as I can discover, for the British Empire. I think the way in which the Liberals appealed to the self-interest of the working-classes to defeat Mr. Chamberlain's magnificent appeal for a united British Empire stamps them as the enemies of their country. Look, too, how they are fraternising with the horrible Germans. Don't you feel, Aylmer, that they have lost all that wonderful spirit of self-reliance and quiet

self-confidence which made England a great country in the time of Napoleon?"

Montgomery agreed that the Liberals were pusillanimous in their foreign policy, but pointed out very gravely to Isabel that England had acquired her past greatness rather easily. There were no United States of America, no German Empire, no Japanese Empire, in the days when England dictated policy to Europe and sold her manufactures in all the ports of the world. Directly her supremacy as a manufacturing nation had been challenged she had shown signs of distress. Germany was now underselling her in many markets hitherto her unquestioned monopoly. Were we not obliged to confront an entirely new set of political circumstances—our population too great for our islands, our education not good enough for the competition of a modern and manufacturing Europe, our submerged classes more dismally degraded than any others in Europe, our agriculture a mere hobby, our dependence on foreign countries for food and raw materials complete, humiliating, and full of menace?

Isabel listened with a certain degree of fear.

"But you do not tell me," she said, "what we ought to do in these changed circumstances. What is your counsel?"

Aylmer looked at her steadily for a moment, and then said, "To be quite frank, I think we are a doomed people."

Isabel roused herself.

"Oh, but I'll never believe that."

"No," he said, "it's not a very pleasant thing to believe."

"But what do you mean—a doomed people?"

"You were speaking just now," he replied, "about the ignorance and the unimperial outlook of the working-classes. Do you find that English aristocracy is intelligent and patriotic?"

"Patriotic, certainly," said Isabel.

"In sentiment?"

"What do you mean?"

"I think that the only patriotism which is respectable and useful is patriotism in action. One rather shudders at a patriotism which is merely verbal."

"But the Liberals won't let the Conservatives put their patriotism into action."

Aylmer smiled at that.

"How are they to act?" asked Isabel.

"Oh, there are many ways."

"But tell me."

He considered for a moment, and then asked her, "Aren't you conscious, Isabel, of a falling-off in the quality of our educated classes and an increasing disinclination to take a Roman's part in the life of the State? There is the Empire to be developed, and they are still shooting partridges. The economic conditions of England are becoming dangerous, and they are still thinking chiefly of Newmarket."

"Well, what is one to do?"

"I wonder!"

"But are you ineffectual, too?"

"I suppose so. We are, you see, a very old people. The Americans are young, the Germans are crude, the Japanese are like children fresh from the nursery. Our rivals, in fact, all want to have plenty to eat—which is a very great stimulus to action, while we have to take *apéritifs* in order to create a false and transitory appetite for food of which we have grown tired. Our dawn was beautiful; our midday was full of a wonderful glory; our sunset, I think, is a little wistful. I can see nothing but sadness wherever I look, and I am very much afraid that it's the sadness of a setting sun."

Isabel again roused herself. "I believe in England," she said, "with all my heart. I know there are many things in her life which are bad, and many more things which are harmful; but this is only a phase—reaction, as it were, after the great energy she expended in the last century. Look what she has done in Egypt and in South Africa. And even this dreadful Lloyd George, as you yourself were saying just now, is trying to do good, not evil."

"Ah," exclaimed Montgomery, "if all the Conservatives in the country were saying that, and were trying to help him to make his good better still! But we are a house divided against itself, and whenever a nation becomes conscious of social division it falls. Don't you feel that the tug of war in our country between rich and poor is increasing its tension? There's no unity anywhere. Look at the Church—divided against itself. Look at our national industry—the country divided against the town, and one trade against another. Look at society—divided into warring sections, and its chief object self-indulgence. Look at politics—a selfish and sectarian contention for place and power. Where can you see unity? Where, my dear Isabel, can you feel the integrating power of patriotism? I begin to see at least the faint beginnings of unity, formidable enough, in the working-classes. When their trades unions realise more intelligently

that unity is strength they may conceivably save England from foreign conquest, but it will not be our England they will save."

"Well, you are very depressing. I wish you would tell me how we can attain national unity."

"I am old-fashioned enough," he replied, "to believe in spiritual forces. I quoted just now the memorable warning that a house divided against itself cannot stand. There is another warning of like character. I do not think it is possible for a nation to serve both God and Mammon. As a matter of practical politics I believe that saying to be profoundly true."

"So do I."

"Well, you see, our main concernment is trade, our greatest obsession is economic. If the mind is attending to the ledgers of the Empire it will have no time, and no patience, to consider the scriptures of human experience. Man does not live by bread alone."

"If only the Church——" began Isabel.

"The Church!" he exclaimed. "But how can you expect religion to set up its standards when we have put the shop-keeper in charge of our destinies?"

"Of course, there must be trade," said Isabel, getting up from the table.

"Yes, as a servant, but not as a master."

Isabel had no time that day to think over these dismal sentiments of Herbert's tutor at Oxford. At three o'clock her carriage came to the door, and she and George were driven away to a struggling mission in the dark places of Hoxton.

She was now glancingly used to slums, but nothing that she had seen hitherto—not even in Notting Dale and the Borough—struck her as so sordid and menacing as the quarter in Hoxton to which her coachman eventually succeeded in finding his way.

She was almost alarmed, on account of George, by the crowd of unwashed, barefoot, and ragged children who swarmed about her carriage at the door of the mission. She thought it was good for the little duke to see every aspect of London, and to become gradually used to formal proceedings; but she did not wish to expose him to the danger of contagion, and the sight of so many streaming nostrils jutting out from the mud-plastered faces all about her, and the sound of such multitudinous snuffling from all those noses, filled her with disquiet. She took George by the hand and hurried him through the hoarse hurraing of these swarming children to the door of the mission.

Among the people who were presented to her inside the hall was a remarkable-looking man, dark-haired and bearded, whose strong face and penetrating voice (his pronunciation was a little pedantic) contrasted violently with the weakness of mere amiability which surrounded her on every side. She learned that his name was Chelford, and that he was a doctor in the neighbourhood. In presenting him the superintendent of the mission said to her with a laugh, "He is a Christian without knowing it, your Grace; and if he wears a red tie, believe me, there's the real milk of human kindness in his heart."

Isabel, who was a practical person, spoke to this romantic-looking doctor about the children, whose hoarse and uproarious voices were reaching them through the closed doors like the bellow of waves on a reef of rocks. "I have never seen so many colds in all my life," she said; "and a cold, after all, is a serious illness, is it not?" He replied, "There's no cod-dling in Hoxton. Those who survive make excellent gun-fodder for our Imperialists." As he said these words he smiled grimly, disclosing excellent teeth through his moustache and beard.

The head of the mission interrupted. "May I present to your Grace," he said, "Dr. Chelford's son, who has already made acquaintance with his Grace—haven't you, Bob?"

Isabel found herself confronted by a coarse-grown and extremely untidy boy, who was scowling at her out of dark eyes, holding his head down like a young and sullen bull. She wondered what impression such an affrighting-looking boy could have produced in her son's mind, and after she had given the curmudgeon her hand, which he took roughly and dropped contemptuously, she turned her head to glance at George. It surprised her to find that he was looking at this terrible boy with apparent admiration.

When she had discharged her duty by saying a few words to the shabby mothers gathered before her, and had joined in a hymn, and had said "Amen" to the grace offered by the superintendent of the mission, and had gone round the tea-tables at which the mothers were seated, but not yet daring to munch, and when she had listened to three creaky cheers given in her honour by those pathetic wrecks of womanhood, and had made her way to her carriage through the snuffling multitude of ragged children outside the doors—when all this fatiguing work was accomplished, and they were driving home together through the foul streets of that shameful quarter, Isabel asked George what Dr. Chelford's son had said to him.

George replied, "He said that he'd like to boil all those ugly old women, and that when he grew up he'd knock my head off."

"Knock your head off!"

"Yes."

"What had you said to him?"

"Nothing."

"What did you say then, when he said that?"

"Nothing."

"Well, in all my life!" exclaimed the duchess.

VIII

IN spite of Aylmer Montgomery's caution, Isabel was among the most persistent and headstrong of Conservative ladies who in May 1910 charged the Liberal Government with the death of King Edward. She had not been a constant visitor to Buckingham Palace, nor had she been an admirer of the dead King, chiefly because he attended so many race-meetings and numbered so many Jews among his closest friends; but she had fallen under the spell of Queen Alexandra, with whose gracious personality she had something a little more than acquaintance, and for her sake, as much as for the sake of the Conservative party, Isabel made use of the King's death to attack the hateful Liberals.

She was among the great ladies of that time who believed with Lord Roberts that the Germans were determined upon the destruction of the British Empire. She also believed that Mr. Haldane had weakened the British Army, and that his passion for Goethe and Hegel had so denationalised him that he was unable to see the German menace with unprejudiced eyes.

To add to the extreme danger of the time, Mr. Lloyd George had become, in her judgment, no better than a common agitator, bent upon revolution. Then there was an outburst, hysterical or not, of dreadful violence on the part of women who demanded the vote; Ministers were waylaid, their hats broken over their heads, their shins kicked, and their faces lashed with whips, by these infuriated and vulgar women, who even included arson in their methods. Where would such a spirit lead to? What elements in the population would next adopt this wicked spirit of violence and destruction? Then there was the terrible situation in Ireland, weakening

our military force and tempting the Germans to fall upon us in an hour of national confusion. Evil days! Surely the wrath of God was over a nation so lost to truth and goodness!

It was during these days that old Mr. Christopher Townley slipped quietly away from the earth, and Lady Theresa Grantham gave up the ghost by taking rather more of a sleeping-draught than was good for her. Isabel was perhaps living too busy and too anxious a life to reflect upon the significance of these two deaths, or even to feel the loss of her father's love.

She was still in a mood of feverish anxiety when the day arrived for Annabel to be presented at Court and George to go to Eton.

Annabel came to London, with Elizabeth and Mary, in the late winter of 1913. She was tall, strong, handsome, and self-reliant, full of talk about Durridge, and extremely critical of the agent who was managing—mismanaging, in her opinion—the estate of her father. She regarded the great social function ahead of her with distinct annoyance, and even came to something like an altercation with her mother over its necessity. She said that she hated London, and intended to spend all her life in the country, therefore she could not see why she should have to go through the boredom of a London season.

Isabel explained to her that she was something more than a farmer's daughter, and reminded her that when George married she would no longer be able to regard Durridge as her home. At this Annabel said with some bitterness, "Apparently I'm the only one of the family at present who does regard it as a home." "What do you mean by that?" asked Isabel, with raised eyebrows but no asperity. Annabel did not shrink before her mother's stare. "I love Durridge," she said. "And do I not love it?" demanded Isabel. "Not as father did," answered Annabel.

To Elizabeth and Mary, London was certainly a much more exciting place than Durridge. Neither of them had Annabel's strong frame and firm flesh, nor was there in the eyes of either of them that look of calm steadiness which was almost formidable in the case of Annabel. Their voices, too, were low and uncertain, almost furtive, and would have suggested, but for the smile that was so often on their lips and in their eyes, the possession of a mystical temperament. While Annabel appeared to be looking life full in the face, her sisters seemed to be peeping at it out of the corners of

their eyes, and seeking for opportunities to surprise it in a delicate or compromising situation.

Thanks to Annabel, they had learnt to hunt, to fish, to play games, and to drive a motor-car; but they did none of these things well, chiefly because, as Annabel told them with cold scorn, they did not take such things seriously. "You are only playing at life," she said to them; "you don't want to do anything well; you simply want to do things anyhow." They never argued with Annabel, or quarrelled with her. They merely grinned when she lectured them, or attempted to hug her into a genial mood. Both of them, however, knew very well what they wanted to do, and when they were alone together they talked of little else.

One thing in this visit to London pleased Annabel very much indeed. She saw a visible improvement in her brother. George had grown into a tall and graceful boy, with excellent manners, a charming expression of face, and a mind that was attractive, even to Annabel, in its refinement and distinction.

He told her with a diffident smile that he was horribly nervous about going to school, but that he had quite abandoned his former intention of running away. He said that he had met two boys who had not been to preparatory schools and who were going up at the same time as he was for the entrance examination, and that he liked them both. He also reported that Aylmer Montgomery was sure he would pass, and thought that he might take Remove, which, he explained, was a fairly swagger thing to do.

"I'm supposed to be rather a stunner at Latin," he said, "and, as my Greek and mathematics have improved, Mr. Montgomery thinks I really may take Remove. I mean to try very hard for it."

Annabel congratulated him. "What about games?" she asked. He laughed uneasily. "I'm not very fond of them," he said; "but I suppose I shall have to do what the other fellows do."

Annabel realised, rather sorrowfully, that a boy of George's build and character would dislike football and cricket, but she hoped that he might take to rowing. "Do you ever ride in the Park?" she asked him. "Oh, no fear!" he said, with a smile; "I'm still terribly afraid of a horse's back." "You'll grow out of that," she assured him; "when you come back to DurrIDGE I'll teach you how to ride, and we'll go hunting together."

George went to Eton with Aylmer Montgomery, who came back with an excellent report of his good manners, his courage,

and his popularity with the other boys. He assured Isabel that there was now no brutality of any kind in a public school. Fights were entirely unknown. Bullying was as dead as bad drainage. The entire atmosphere of Eton was now as mild as a girls' high school, and the only coarseness that remained was the bad language of some of the older boys. "George," he said, "will never fall into that bad habit, nor, I think, will he ever become slangy. You see, he is extraordinarily well acquainted with the lyric poetry of England, from Skelton, Wyatt, and Lord Surrey to Herrick, Marvell, and Cotton. I think we may safely say that he is fortified against all the vulgarities."

Soon after George had taken Remove, and settled down to his first term, Annabel was presented at Court. She disliked the elaborate dressmaking of this occasion, and loathed with all her vigorous mind the grinning stares of people who gaped into the constantly arrested motor-car in which she sat with her mother as it crawled towards the palace. She looked with cold disdain at the fluttered and flustered women who lined the great room through which she had to pass, some of whom were fingering their hair, others having their feathers readjusted, and others even examining with alarm some mishap to their trains. It seemed to her the most unnatural and contemptible exhibition in the world—this crowd of women waiting with evident anxiety, and an appearance of being already tousled and dishevelled, for a momentary presentation to the King and Queen.

Because of her mother's great position in the life of London, photographs of Annabel had been published in most of the illustrated papers. People recognised her, even in their excitement, and pointed her out to others. "That is Lady Annabel Stretton; she has lived all her life in a haunted castle, and breeds pigs and horses. What a complexion! She looks like a gypsy, doesn't she?"

Ladies who knew the duchess, looking at Annabel, thought about their sons. Some of them, who had little girls in the nursery, even allowed the thought of Annabel's brother to cross their minds. Six or seven years from now he would be among the princes of mankind. Rumour said he was clever, and that his mother was most carefully preparing him for a triumphant career in the House of Lords; in any case, he would be fabulously rich. These ladies looked at Isabel's tiara and permitted those fine diamonds to dazzle them with romantic dreams.

None of them dreamed, however, that before summer was gone the whole world of civilisation would be plunged into the darkness of ruin.

Annabel got through her first season without much discomfort, and, indeed, enjoyed some of the parties given by her mother, and some of the parties to which she was taken by her mother. She greatly enjoyed a visit to Goodwood and a visit to Glantingham—particularly the visit to Glantingham, because she there established a motherly friendship with Jenny, the little daughter of Lord and Lady Hawthorpe. This lovely child adored Annabel at first sight, and early every morning she ran in her dressing-gown to Annabel's room, jumped into her bed, and began talking about animals.

Perhaps this visit to Glantingham was also memorable on account of Lord Hawthorpe's son, Dicky, an extremely handsome young man, with something of his father's vigour of spirit, who paid Annabel marked attention, and whose tastes and tendencies were, as he himself described them, the dead spit of hers. Between Dicky and Jenny the visit to Glantingham was made an episode in Annabel's industrious life which left behind it many memories.

But Annabel was glad when the season began to draw to its close, for her heart hungered after DurrIDGE, and she was for ever uneasy about the agent's mismanagement.

Then came the outbreak of war with the Central Powers, and the curtain was somewhat hurriedly rung down on the social life of the English people.

IX

AMONG those women of whom it was afterward said that they "thoroughly enjoyed" the world war, Isabel occupied an almost pre-eminent position. To begin with, she had no son on any of the battle-fronts. Then she saw for herself in that titanic struggle of empires a visible contention between the forces of God and the forces of evil. It was, in fact, such an opportunity for—well, whether to call it self-expression or self-sacrifice she did not know, but, in any case, such an opportunity for employing all her spiritual energies as she had never imagined to be possible. Finally, she felt in her very bones that the British Empire was at last welded into one mighty organism, and that never again would it be possible for the rich and poor of Great Britain to stand in political opposition to one another.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that few people in England worked harder for the triumph of her country's cause than the Duchess of Rothbury. She was not only a directing genius in many of those war-time organisations which ministered to soldiers returning from the front, and to the widows and orphans of those soldiers who perished in the general carnage, but she played a personal part of considerable value in entertaining officers from the various Dominions during their leave in England, and every day set apart an hour, and sometimes two hours, for writing letters—many of which are cherished to this day by their recipients—to the mothers and wives of those gallant Dominion soldiers.

She found an almost sublime happiness in contemplating the passionate figure of Mr. Lloyd George—"a man, if ever there was one," she used to say, "raised up by God Himself to save a noble country in the hour of its extremity." It thrilled Isabel in every quivering nerve of her body to think that this statesman of the Empire had been torn away from the bickerings of parish-pump politics, and also from the wickedness of disruptive Radicalism, to become the voice and conscience of England in her death-struggle with the Powers of Darkness.

While Lady Skipton rejoiced with a full heart over the expulsion of Mrs. Asquith from Downing Street, as if this were the supreme blessing of those anxious times, the duchess, who saw the whole sordid war as a divine epic, thanked God for Mr. Lloyd George, and regarded him as a proof of God's presence on the side of the Allies.

When Aylmer Montgomery, who was now employed in the Foreign Office, hinted to her that some of the Prime Minister's intimate friends were not merely second-rate people, but very undesirable people, she told him that a man in that position, and dealing with a crisis of that intolerable magnitude, had to work with all sorts of weapons to gain his end. "Nothing will ever persuade me," she averred, "that Mr. Lloyd George has not been raised up among us by God Himself for the salvation of our country and the unifying of our wondrous Empire." She liked to expatiate in those days on the romantic fact that God had not chosen one of the great ones of the nation to be England's St. George, but the orphan son of a Welsh schoolmaster, who had been brought up in a cobbler's shop.

Because she saw England in so beautiful a light, and believed that the outcome of the war would be a purged and

consolidated British Empire four-square to all the winds of adversity, Isabel could bear, not only the fatigue of her indefatigable labours, but the personal sorrows that befell her in the course of the war.

Many of her nephews were killed, some of them young men of considerable promise ; and Lord Hawthorpe, whose only son, the handsome Dicky, had been killed quite early in the war, was back at Glantingham blinded and maimed for life. Sorrow for these things, however, could not quench her ardour for victory, and she was, indeed, so carried away by her vision that she seldom expressed even a passing censure on the festivities with which a certain section of smart people in London disfigured those Spartan times.

Isabel never complained about rationing. On the contrary, she embraced that fresh hardship as a nun embraces the solitude of her cell. She did not really eat in those days ; she nibbled. She began to find a strange pleasure even in wearing old dresses, and in walking to her various duties instead of driving. With the exception of a butler too old for war service, all her servants were women, and she kept about her as few of these women as possible, in order that munition factories and other services staffed by women should not suffer for lack of labour. Mr. Colby was continually selling out her investments in industrial securities in order to provide money for Government loans, and her contributions to war charities were on a scale of staggering generosity.

"What does it matter," she would exclaim, "if we are all poor, even ruined, so long as England emerges purified and triumphant?"

Every morning and every night of her life the names of Lord Kitchener and Mr. Lloyd George were mentioned in her prayers.

Durrige was used for the purpose of hospitality towards Dominion officers on leave from the battle-fronts. Cumberland had become a hospital, and Mrs. Townley, who in spite of her great age was neither blind nor deaf, and who could sit up for three hours at a time, was therefore free to help Annabel in the work of entertaining these young men.

The agent, and a very considerable number of Durrige men, had gone to the war, so that Annabel, much to her satisfaction, was in complete charge of Durrige fortunes. Among the Canadians, New Zealanders, Australians, and South Africans who came on leave to the castle she found many

who preferred lending her a helping hand to indulging themselves in shooting or fishing, and even several who diffidently expressed to her the wonder whether she might conceivably be so gracious as to consider them in the light of her adorers. But Annabel was too absorbed in the difficulties of her task, which were truly of great magnitude, to consider anything so frivolous as her own domestic circumstances. Apart altogether from the gigantic task of keeping that vast estate in any semblance of order with a total insufficiency of labour, she had to deal—because she knew her father would have expected her to do so—with the many tragedies in the homes of the quarrymen and miners away at the war. Often it was only by a quite heroic effort of spirit that she was able to dance with the young officers after dinner, or to fight down her yawns as she answered their questions about the antiquities of the castle.

In London her two sisters, whose photographs were constantly appearing in the illustrated papers—now as hospital nurses, now as stall-holders at war charity bazaars, now as actresses in theatricals, now as drivers of motor-cars, and now as canteen workers at one of the chief railway-stations—were not only busy from morning to night, but very often from morning to morning. For they were never too tired to go off at a moment's notice to entertain officers home from the front by singing to them or dancing with them into the small hours, and sometimes, after such a dance, they would each get into an open car with a young officer and drive over Wimbledon Common, Putney Heath, and beyond Richmond Park, before they returned to their beds.

Isabel was too absorbed in her own work, and had herself become so tolerant in the rough and tumble of war experience, to take serious notice of any changes in these two girls. But towards the end of the war she began to detect in them a spirit which shocked her, and, observing them more closely, came at last to be genuinely alarmed by their behaviour.

Their skirts had been growing shorter and shorter. They had learned to sprawl in a chair, or to lie full length on the floor in front of a fire, exposing stockinged legs up to the knees, even in a drawing-room full of men. At a dinner-table they would powder their faces and redden their lips. At all hours of the day they would be ringing the bell for cocktails. Very often, even when old and dignified ladies were present, they would smoke in the middle of tea, or go out to their cars in the square with a cigarette between their lips.

Isabel had satisfied herself hitherto by remonstrances, sometimes kind and always cheerful, for she had no wish to daunt their spirits; but one day something happened which revealed to her with a dreadful shock the really dangerous mental and spiritual condition of her daughters.

They were speaking one night at dinner of a dance which had been postponed on account of a famous person's death, a dance to which they had been greatly looking forward, and Elizabeth expressed the opinion that this postponement was "a bloody shame."

The duchess could hardly believe her ears.

"What did you say?" she demanded, white as a ghost.

Mary laughed, tapping a cigarette on the plate at her side, like an actor on the film. Elizabeth looked at her outraged mother and replied, "I said it was a beastly shame."

"That was not the word you used," retorted Isabel.

"Wasn't it?"

"You know very well it wasn't."

"What you said," interposed Mary, striking a match, "was that it was a b-dash-y shame, and I quite agree with you."

Before Isabel could reply, Elizabeth explained to her mother that a very illustrious person had set the fashion in using this horrible word, and that, as he used it to his hostesses at dinner-parties and to girls with whom he was dancing, she saw no harm in using it herself. "It's the only word I know," she concluded, "which adequately expresses one's feelings when they are really upset. Besides, it is a war word. The war has consecrated it, so to speak."

Isabel, pale and terrified, began to lecture her daughters with great sternness. She spoke with dignity and with good sense. No one could have dealt more sensibly and rightly with the situation. But the girls showed signs of increasing restiveness, if not of open insubordination, and at last Elizabeth, getting up from the table while her mother was still speaking, exclaimed hotly, "Oh, for God's sake don't treat us as if we were still in the nursery!" and went from the room.

Mary remained, but uneasily. She endeavoured to explain things to her mother. "You see, we are both suffering from war nerves," she said, getting up from her chair. "We are doing far too much work for our health. If it wasn't for cocktails we should never get through it. You mustn't think we have gone to the devil. We're only feeling the strain of downing the Hun."

Isabel endeavoured to stop her, but Mary said she had an engagement for which she was already late, and went out of the room in front of her mother.

On the following day, after earnest prayers and a sleepless night, Isabel summoned her daughters before her and read them the Riot Act. They heard her out, and then told her that they had received more than one offer to go on the stage, and that if she did not care for their society they would accept the best of these offers, which happened to come from America, and henceforth earn their own living.

"Put such an idea quite out of your heads," said Isabel.

"Well, you must put the idea out of your head," rejoined Elizabeth, "that we are children."

"Remember, mother," said Mary, "we have been cheated out of all the pleasures which you had when you were our age. The war has mucked up our girlhood. We can't be expected to see life as you see it."

This was the first dreadful check in Isabel's social career. She had been so happy in her broad-mindedness during the war. She had even been charming to Mr. Lloyd George, and gracious to men who offended her taste in every conceivable way, because she believed they were devoted to England; she had not merely tolerated Jews, Romans, and Anglo-Catholics, but had become the warm friend of many of these people in her enthusiasm for a united England inspired by a righteous idea. Often she had thanked God for her broader mind, and again and again endeavoured to persuade Lady Skipton that love was the one power by which all men might be brought into religious and political unity. And often, too, she had disputed with Aylmer Montgomery, seeking to shake his scepticism, and to convince him that England had at last discovered her soul.

Now she was face to face with something that terrified her. She saw the nation, not on its knees, thanking God for deliverance, but rushing off, to make up for lost time, to pleasures which seemed definitely to mock the dead. And among this undignified rabble were two of her own children. Exhausted by her labours in the war, almost broken-hearted by the dreadful licence of society, and aware of dim, mutinous rumblings beginning to make themselves horribly heard from the world of Labour, Isabel found herself incapable of dealing with her daughters, and left them to go their own way.

One comfort ministered to her tired and dejected spirit. George was everything that her weary heart could desire.

His boyish good looks had developed into a refinement and a sensitiveness which were almost beautiful. It needed only strength in that delicate and charming face—and strength would surely come with manhood—to make him as handsome a man as any in London. Moreover, he showed no signs whatever, beyond a certain shy love of dancing, for the pleasures of a rackety world. He was studious, reflective, observant, and extremely gentle in his manner. His career at Eton had not been brilliant in any way, but it had been entirely honourable. He was certainly no dullard, and was going up to Oxford with every promise of becoming a scholarly and a dignified man, worthy to take a becoming part in the history of a great Empire.

Isabel adored him. To him, far more than to anyone else in the world, did she open her heart. She spoke to him quite freely of Elizabeth and Mary, deploring their lax habits, their late hours, their friends, their drinking, smoking, and swearing, asking George to tell her what she could do to bring them to a proper sense of self-respect. His invariable answer, given with the sweetest of his smiles, and accompanied by one of his charming caresses, took the ancient form of expressing faith in the action of time. "They will grow out of these war ways, I expect; people say that after a great war, or any sort of social or political upheaval, there is always a reaction of one kind or another. I shouldn't worry, mother dear; after all, they are very fond of you, and that will keep them from doing anything really foolish."

He often said to her that it would perhaps be a good thing if she took his sisters up to DurrIDGE for a long stay, always speaking of Annabel with great admiration. But Isabel had not felt deeply fond of her eldest child for many years, and had been inclined to think, during the terrible strain of the war, that Annabel had shirked her patriotic duty, and selfishly made an excuse of the war to become agent of DurrIDGE. Perhaps, too, she dreaded that when Annabel saw her two sisters she might be inclined to say, "There, what did I tell you? That's what London does to the human soul."

While she was in this mood one of her brothers came to see her from the North of England. He had lost two of his sons in the war, and had made not a penny of personal profit out of the necessities of his country; yet, to her surprise, Isabel found him quietly happy and calmly confident—not as if personal sorrow had visited him in vain, but rather as if some

inward strength of the man had bound that grief to the service of his developing soul.

She could see in him something not visible in the generality of aristocratic men. It was apparent to her that he lacked a certain grace, a certain charm, a certain ease of manner, and perhaps even a certain polish, which one expected and took for granted in the men of fashion of his own age. But she was also aware in him of something tougher and more validly English than one found in men of fashion. He was more mentally athletic, she felt, than London men. He was strong, self-confident, even a little boastful. He had the look of one who has endured hard knocks, but who has easily held his own, and intends never to be beaten. As he spoke to her, Isabel thought of her father, and felt that this brother rather splendidly represented the heirs of those great fighting industrialists who had laid the economic fortunes of England in the reign of Victoria.

She spoke to him of war debts and of the difficult time which now confronted the nation.

He replied : " Our fathers paid the debt for the Napoleonic wars. We shall pay this debt just as easily—more easily."

" But it's so much greater ! "

" And our powers to pay it are so much greater. "

" In what way ? "

" Every way you can think of. Machinery. Electricity. Massed production. Improved transport. Besides, they were a small nation—ten millions or so ; we are getting on for fifty millions. "

" I am glad you are so hopeful. "

" Hopeful ! " he exclaimed. " Never was such an opportunity presented to a country. The trade of the world is at our feet. Our only conceivable rival is down and out. Think what it means. For over four years the nations of the earth have been going short in the needs of civilisation. They are now hungry for goods, all of them. Who is to supply their demands ? This country. We shall not merely pay our debts easily, but we shall see such prosperity in England as our fathers never knew. "

" It sounds too good to be true. "

" It is as true as the defeat of Germany, the destruction of her fleet, and the handing over of her merchant marine. " He laughed comfortably at that. " The ball's at our feet. "

" But will our working classes—— ? " asked Isabel.

" Ah, I cannot answer for the agitators. "

"The Russian Revolution is so terrible," she exclaimed.

"The newspapers make a great mistake in treating Russia seriously. She never was, and she never will be, a serious consideration for Europe. Blot her out of your mind. She may be a boil in Asia, but she is not even a headache in Europe."

"I hope our agitators will be loyal."

"I hope our politicians will be strong. But——"

"Yes?" inquired Isabel.

He drew down the corners of his strong mouth. "They're a poor lot. As nervous as rabbits. Too many lawyers among them. Look at their treatment of Violet Douglas-Pennant. Cowards! Dirty dogs! Not a man of the real breed among the whole lot! We shall have to kick them into action."

From this conversation Isabel derived a certain amount of comfort in her domestic distress, and when she went up to Durridge it was with the hope that a new age had dawned for England and the Empire, an age in which, not only would the country enjoy a plentiful prosperity, but in which the fashionable classes would come to their senses, and set a real example of noble patriotism to a Christian nation.

Elizabeth and Mary, she told herself, would recover their good sense when the war spirit had quite passed, and society had returned to normal ways.

X

DURING his first year at Oxford the Duke of Rothbury came to be a member of a circle of undergraduates who met together in each other's room to discuss philosophical and political questions. One day a member of this circle named Geoffrey Claughton, who had been at Eton with George, said to him, "I should like you to meet a remarkable person I came across yesterday. He was at Merchant Taylors, and is now a fourth-year Johnian pig. His opinions are eccentric, but it's rather an experience to listen to him."

The duke inquired if this Johnian ever spoke at the Union, and was told that, on the contrary, he regarded the Union as a part of the "tosh" which had long since destroyed Oxford as a seat of learning.

On the following afternoon the two young men walked over to St. John's College. Claughton knocked at a door on the first floor, and, being bidden by a loud, impatient, and

grudging voice to enter, opened the door, put his head into the room, and inquired if the occupant was busy.

"Come in if you want to, but don't stay longer than you can help," replied the occupant, the voice as grudging as before.

George found himself in a disorderly room, and in the disturbing presence of a disorderly young man who was seated at a table in the window, a large curved pipe in his mouth and an open book before him. The face of this tousled-haired young man was strong and forbidding, full of pugnacity and fanaticism, yet there was such an unusual brightness in the dark eyes, which were both large and deep-set, that the coarse and oppugnant face was attractive rather than repellent.

The sordid shabbiness of the room, which was not so much carelessly untidy as deliberately dirty, struck the young duke with a feeling of great discomfort. He was inclined to back out of it as from something unclean. He found himself looking at the smeared panes of the leaded windows, and longing to open them, not to let out the thick reek of tobacco, but to let in something from the open air with which he was familiar and which he could feel was in the order of nature. But, in spite of this immediate feeling of discomfort, he was soon after so interested in the owner of the room that he forgot to think of anything else, or, rather, was completely unconscious of anything else. The young man was not only structurally and muscularly impressive, but in some very poignant fashion spiritually different from other people.

When George was introduced, this young man fixed his dark eyes on him, took his curved pipe from his mouth, and said, "We have met before."

George thought, smiled, and was about to speak when the young man said, "You don't remember? Yet a visit to Hoxton ought to have stamped itself upon your mind."

Still George was perplexed.

The young man got up and pointed with the gnawed mouthpiece of his pipe to a shabby arm-chair by the fireplace. "Sit down. Smoke if you want to. Your mother came to open a new wing of a mission, or something of that sort, and she brought you——"

"Oh, of course. Yes, I remember perfectly."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

They were both now looking at each other with great interest.

"I remember," said George, with an engaging smile, "that you promised to knock my head off when you grew up."

"Did I say that?" He, too, smiled, and the smile was a pleasant one, though it soon passed from his face.

"I think you expressed a wish to boil all the old women in the hall, and, as an afterthought, to knock my head off as soon as possible."

"Well, that's interesting. Do sit down."

"I remember you impressed me," said George, taking the shabby chair by the fireplace.

"I imagine that I did! Find yourself a chair, Claughton. There's one over there."

"I'm not sure," said the duke, "that you weren't the first person I ever felt curious about."

"The first person I was ever curious about," returned Chelford, leaning against the mantelpiece and looking into the bowl of his pipe, "was a damned old humbug of a policeman who paraded our street when I was about three years old. He had a nose like a torch, eyes like oysters, a black moustache that stuck out from his lips horizontally, and a vast, ominous belly that made the buckle of his belt look as if it would fly apart at any moment."

"What made you curious about him?" asked Claughton.

Chelford looked up from his pipe. "I knew in my bones he was a humbug."

"Would it spoil the story," said Claughton, "if I asked, And was he?"

Chelford turned his eyes on the duke. "There's a great book to be written on that theme—*The Book of Humbugs*. But I daresay you've thought about it already."

George shook his head.

"You must meet so many," said Chelford.

"Why?"

"But in your world they take some finding out. They're the finished product, the fine flower of social evolution. In my world they're as obvious as the villains in Dickens."

Claughton quoted, "'An honest man's the noblest work of God.'"

Chelford corrected, with a new intensity in his voice, "'An honest man's the greatest foe of God.'"

Claughton explained to the duke that Chelford was a deicide, a term which for the moment puzzled George and then shocked him.

"How can any man who has read history be anything else?" demanded Chelford.

"He believes, you see, that religion is one of the weapons

which humbug has always used to suppress the freedom of the mind."

Chelford said, addressing himself to the duke, "Instead of discussing my opinions, let us make an appointment to discuss yours."

"I'm afraid I haven't got any," said the duke, rising from the shabby chair.

"Well, that's the general condition of the House of Lords. But I hope to God you haven't come to Oxford to get a supply. Any night you like, except Tuesday and Saturday. Nine o'clock. You may bring Claughton if you care to."

As they walked back to the House, slouching through the streets with their hands in their pockets, George asked Claughton to tell him something more about this weird Johnian pig. "He's an atheist, and what else? A Socialist, I take it."

"An atheist, yes. But politically I'm damned if I know what he is. Sometimes he speaks like a Socialist, sometimes like a Tory, and sometimes like a Communist. I've only just lately met him. Lumpton introduced me to him. Lumpton says he's a man of real power."

"Lumpton's a bit of a Bolshevik, isn't he?"

"The Lord knows. He'll end his days as a monk, you may be pretty certain."

After a few steps in silence George said, "I suppose this fellow isn't a *poseur*, is he?"

"Come to that, my dear fellow, all young men are more or less *poseurs*. What else can they be?"

"Yes, none of us has enough knowledge to know what to believe."

"Or enough experience to know how to live," said Claughton.

The duke said, "Rawlie's idea is that life is an art, not a business, and that as soon as a man takes anything seriously—that's to say, as a part of reality—he's lost. I heard him say the other night that religion, regarded as an art, is one of the most beautiful things in the world; but, regarded as an exact science, it's one of the blankest absurdities in human life. He said that only a mathematician could understand the difference between a Unitarian and a Trinitarian, and that it was a most unfortunate mistake to introduce vulgar fractions into the æsthetic region of spirit."

"That's exactly what I mean about all of us being *poseurs*," replied Claughton. "We pretend, and we must pretend, to

believe—well, whatever we do eventually choose to believe, or find convenient to believe. Look at science, for example. The fallacy of one age is the fact of the next. Nobody knows anything with certainty. Even the grown-ups are still guessing, bless their bald heads. But as for Chelford, I don't think he has consciously adopted this pose of his. At any rate, it's a real pose of his. I think it means as much to him as the Covenant meant to Cromwell and the divine right meant to Charles. He may grow out of it; but if he does, it will hurt like the devil, I'm sure of that. In any case, you ought to look him up."

George needed no encouragement to look up this extraordinary undergraduate. He found himself thinking of Chelford whenever he was alone, particularly when he was in bed. His own rooms, which were furnished with taste and kept with scrupulous care, began to seem to him unreal and artificial, like his own life, in comparison with the gloomy and untidy dark room in St. John's, whose owner filled it with an energetic and almost oppressive personality.

To know what that man really thought about the world, and by what principles he intended to govern his life when he went down from the University, became a chief curiosity in the duke's tentative mind. He walked over to St. John's very frequently, and before Chelford went down they had advanced far in friendship.

XI

ISABEL was tempted to take up her residence in Oxford during George's years at the University. Perhaps it was only the dissuasion of Aylmer Montgomery which prevented her from yielding to this natural impulse. He assured her that George would dislike it, that it would be an occasion for ribald rhyme and practical jokes, and that it might even be remembered against him when he came to take up a public career.

But Isabel was determined to keep an eye upon George during these fateful years, and she did so in a way which was characteristic of her pertinacious thoroughness. Besides visiting Oxford for Eights Week, and making excuses from time to time to stay with friends in that part of the country, she made acquaintance with the wife of a don at Christ Church, a woman of vigorous character and accurate intelligence, and from this dependable woman, Mrs. Glassborow, Isabel received not only letters of singular interest, but several visits, which kept her well posted as to George's development.

"Now I want you to be quite frank with me, Mrs. Glassborow," said Isabel on one of these visits, during George's second year, "and to tell me if you detect in George any tendencies towards——"

Mrs. Glassborow had the strained and bald appearance of so many ladies with academic relations. Structurally her face was eager, anticipatory, and responsive; but the animation of her spirit had apparently long burnt itself out, and left only a fading impression of impetuous eagerness in the rather sorrowful eyes, so that her face was now at once impulsive and resigned.

She interrupted Isabel with a decisiveness and an outspokenness meant to relieve her august hostess from any distress in dealing with a delicate matter. In the crisp and toneless voice of a practical woman of affairs she cut in, "I know precisely what you mean, duchess. None whatever. On the contrary, one might regard it almost as a danger that he should feel so little interest in women. But that, you must know, is a trait in the young men of the present generation. Many of them, I may tell you, are so girlish themselves that——"

"You don't detect girlishness in George?"

"Well, a little. Just a little. Yes, I must be quite frank with you, duchess; I do detect in him a slight element of what one may describe as girlishness."

"I think you must be mistaken."

"My husband shares my opinion."

"Would you mind explaining what you mean by *girlishness*?"

Mrs. Glassborow was at no loss for a definition. "I mean," she said, "an insufficient animal vitality. That's a very curious characteristic of the times. One doesn't expect the boy of the present day to resemble the Vikings who came to Britain conquering from the northward, lords by land and sea—you remember; but one is entitled to expect from them, I think, a love of vigorous games, no fear of a shower of rain, and a somewhat less meticulous anxiety concerning their socks. My husband complains that the public schoolboy of to-day comes up to Oxford chiefly to cultivate a correct taste in handkerchiefs, and to educate himself in parting his hair. A little less of the looking-glass in the boys of to-day, and a little more of the—what shall I say?—not the jungle, perhaps, but the open sea and the moors, would give one a happier assurance that they will be able to maintain the best traditions of our race."

Isabel refused entirely to take this point of view.

"I was the only girl," she said, "in a family of many boys, and I perfectly remember how fastidious my young brothers were about their clothes and their appearance when they were George's age."

"Exactly. Exactly. But, duchess"—here Mrs. Glassborow lifted a significant finger—"for what purpose?"

"I don't understand."

Mrs. Glassborow smiled indulgently and triumphantly. She was speaking as an expert to a mere amateur. "A young man," she said, in a tone impressively *ex cathedra*, "who dresses with the sole purpose of pleasing himself is on a different footing from the young man who 'gets himself up,' as the phrase has it, in order to attract the sparkling eye of a girl. I take it your brothers were considerable lady-killers. So were mine. My husband was far and away the most brilliant man at the House in his undergraduate days, and entirely careless about his appearance; but when he met me, duchess, he at once manifested the most appalling imaginable taste in ties, and bought himself a suit of such violent tweeds—a regular chessboard affair—that he became the subject of a skit.

Oh, have you heard Glassborow's suit?

Shut your ears, shut your ears, shut your ears!

He has deafened us all, the great brute,

And reduced Rhoda Mullins to tears.

I was Rhoda Mullins, of course. But that, duchess, is not the spirit which animates the boys of to-day. It is something quite different. They are self-centred. My husband thinks it is the result of hot baths, cigarettes, and arm-chairs. There's a weakened backbone at the University to-day; there's no getting away from the fact; and there's also a much feebler animal vitality. Sucked asparagus!—sucked asparagus!"

"You are depressing me a good deal, Mrs. Glassborow," said Isabel, as if her displeasure at ill-tidings could dismiss them into the convenient region of legend and lie.

"But let us look at the matter from another angle," persisted the Oxford lady. "These young men are extremely refined. There is little coarseness at the University to-day. They are interested in music, in literature, in the ballet. They talk remarkably well. I don't know that any of them have yet swallowed Epstein, but they are tending that way; yes, they are moving in that direction. It's an age of revolt.

The duke, for instance, finds nothing attractive in our Victorian literature, but is marvellously well acquainted with French and Russian literature. He is also in a set which takes philosophy with real seriousness. Most of his acquaintances are men of very considerable scholarship ; two of them are men who will certainly be heard of in after years."

"I am not very happy about that taste of his," said the worried Isabel ; "that taste for philosophy."

"Oh, yes ; it has its dangers."

"It's—it's a questioning spirit," said Isabel.

"It certainly induces scepticism."

"Exactly ; and scepticism about matters which ought to be sacred ; I mean matters which demand faith."

"Yes, indeed."

"I hope George will never question the foundations of his religion."

"He is bound to go through a time of unsettlement and unrest."

"Why ? "

"All young men of intelligence do, except those of the Roman Catholic faith."

"Is that really so ? "

Mrs. Glassborow was emphatic on this point. "Our young men are not so well grounded in their faith as the young men who have had to endure the hammering of priests in their boyhood. Religion to-day is not taken very seriously in society. It is there as a convention—not even as an emotion, certainly not as a passion. No ; it's just a convention. It is something one 'does.' Or, perhaps, one should say in these days that it is something one 'does' if one feels inclined, and that one 'doesn't' if one isn't inclined."

"A very perilous condition ! "

"But don't you feel, duchess, that the whole fabric of Western civilisation is in a perilous condition ? "

"I think I am justified in asking you a question," said Isabel rather sternly.

"Yes ? "

"What is Oxford doing to restore the authority of religion ? "

"Like everything else in civilisation," replied Mrs. Glassborow, "Oxford is drifting."

"Drifting ! " exclaimed Isabel.

"But, then, she has never done anything else. That is her traditional way of—well, not advancing, but waiting for the future to turn up."

For a moment there flitted before Isabel an extraordinary figure—a caricature so grotesque that she was too startled to be amused by it. Then she saw what trick her imagination, or her subconsciousness, had played upon her. It had clapped John Henry Newman into the habiliments of Mr. Micawber and sent him drifting before her vision with the exclamation, "The Oxford Movement!"

This word of Mrs. Glassborow—*drifting*—was the word which most haunted Isabel's mind. Wherever she went in her social world she now became vividly conscious of this movement—an aimless shifting of the human mass, a restless gliding of the whole nation from the firm and rooted stabilities of the past to the edge of an open and uncharted sea covered by the darkness of the unknown. No sense of direction. No feeling of purpose. Nothing mapped out. Nothing decided. What the Duke of Wellington had said of Sir Robert Peel might be said of this whole generation; no one troubled to see the end of a campaign. We had muddled through the South African War. We had muddled through the war with the Central Powers. We were apparently now muddling through to a muddled peace. Were we also attempting, with an impious indifference to sacred revelation, to muddle through God's discipline of earthly experience? What can come to a civilisation which denies guidance, and is too indolent to have a purpose of its own?

During his vacations George went abroad, sometimes with Isabel, sometimes with Aylmer, and once with his friend Geoffrey Claughton. He spoke French very well, German with difficulty, Italian with increasing ease. He read industriously the classics of French literature, and a number of Russian works in their French translation. He was interested in the architecture of foreign countries, in the procession of humanity through the streets of Continental cities, but showed little inclination to explore picture galleries and museums. Isabel found him a most charming companion, and was so astonished by his learning that she not only shrank from questioning him as to his religious opinions, but began to build definite hopes of his future greatness.

She said to him one night, as they drove back from a dinner at the British Embassy in Paris, that she had pictured him to herself during the dinner sitting at the head of the table in Lord Bertie's chair. "You would like to be an ambassador, wouldn't you?" she inquired.

He replied, "I should say it would be very amusing for a little time."

"Why only for a little time?"

"Don't you think," he asked, "that there's something rather boring and pathetic about old diplomatists?"

"But, of course," she said, "you would only graduate in diplomacy; your settled place is in the House of Lords."

He affected to shudder. "Isn't that a dreadful prospect?" he asked. "But anything continuous and settled is bound to be dull."

She corrected such a naughty thought by patting his hand.

"You won't talk such nonsense," she said, "when you are married."

"Married!" he exclaimed. "My darling mother, you don't suppose I shall ever marry?"

"Of course you will."

"Well, that's a thousand times worse in my eyes than growing into an old ambassador with an eyeglass and an imperial. I can't imagine how any man can put such a halter round his neck. To live with one woman all one's life! The same face, the same voice, the same mind! I can't imagine it."

Isabel tried to smile. "Of course you can't," she answered, "because you are still only a boy."

"My idea of life," he said, quietly, "is education of the mind through experience, and so the more experience one can get the better. I have a perfect horror of tramlines, and a rut is more terrifying to me than a ghost."

In the winter of his third year George was taken suddenly ill at Oxford, and this illness, developing swiftly into pneumonia, brought Isabel to the city.

Mrs. Glassborow explained that George had gone to a dance, had got very hot, had been unable to find his overcoat, and had foolishly walked through the cold streets in his evening things. "Like the rest of us," she said, "he has taken up dancing. My husband is as bad as all the others; he declares that dancing is good for one's health. I am inclined to share his opinion. I sleep much better since I moved my body about to the rhythm of syncopated music. It has jerked me into a new consciousness of simple human pleasure. We find, too, my husband and I, that dancing is a new bond of interest between us. We talk about it, and we practise the new steps to a gramophone."

Those were days of distraction such as Isabel had never hitherto experienced. That George might die seemed to her

as awful a thought as the end of the world. To sit by his bedside and watch that delicate face darkening to the colour of mauve, his nostrils fluttering for breath, his young bosom wrestling with the pangs of strangulation, his long and sensitive fingers growing into the likeness of claws, and those wonderful eyes of his, blue-grey, deep-set, long-lashed, and innocent of all baseness, waning every day, while the dark shadows beneath them spread ominously like an eclipse—this to Isabel was an agony such as no words can describe.

She did, of course, all that human thought could do to save her son from the jaws of cruel death. She prayed to God incessantly, and she sent to London for Lord Dawson and Sir Bruce Bruce-Porter. Her prayers were as earnest as her appeals to science. But, while she wrote to Lilian Skipton that she left the issue entirely in the hands of the Almighty, she certainly gave the physicians little rest in urging them to save her son.

Mrs. Glassborow maintained a confident faith that George would recover, and was never too occupied to comfort Isabel by listening to her fears and singing the praises of George. This was no hour for criticism. According to Mrs. Glassborow, he had developed during the last year in a quite astonishing manner. He was not merely clever; he was brilliant. He had, unquestionably, the Greats mind. More than this; his moral influence was very remarkable. He had the most extraordinary tolerance; he was interested in the views of Socialists and atheists, and yet everyone knew and felt that his own principles were those of aristocracy and religion. There could be no question that he was greatly respected. Because of him, Socialism never left the ground of mild and harmless idealism, while atheism, under his influence, remained as wistful and respectable as the religion of Benjamin Jowett.

"His influence," she explained to the bewildered Isabel, "is entirely on the side of Pyrrhonism. Some beautiful radiance in his spirit smiles away the assertiveness and the pugilism of all our young dogmatists, whatever their school of thought. He holds the balance in every discussion which takes place in his presence, and we hear from many quarters that every tendency to the provincialism of violent beliefs and irrational enthusiasm vanishes directly he enters a room."

Isabel also learned that George was greatly beloved by the college servants and by many of the humbler people at Oxford. "He has the most ingratiating way of addressing servants," Mrs. Glassborow explained, "and they say that the way in

which he thanks them for any little thing they do is as good as a week's wages. I really think, duchess—and many agree with me—that there has never been anyone at the House so universally loved and so honourably respected."

There was much truth in what she said, but her purpose was to create in Isabel's mind so lovely an image of her son that if he should die she would be content to kneel and worship at a perfect memory for the rest of her life.

George grew slowly better, and at last was able to be moved. Isabel decided to take him to the South of France. A villa was rented at Roquebrune, and they motored there together by easy stages. It was agreed between them on this journey that he should not return to Oxford, and that his coming-of-age celebrations should be postponed till June.

The grave illness from which he had been so mercifully saved revived newspaper interest in the Strettons, and introduced the public for the first time to the personality of the reigning duke. His photograph appeared in numerous illustrated papers, and by its beauty created a strong feeling in his favour among the domesticated middle classes. Then followed paragraphs and articles, the work of industrious reporters who dashed off from Fleet Street at a moment's notice to Oxford and to Durrige. George was exhibited, not merely as a brilliant scholar, but as a landowner adored by the people on his estate. There were statements concerning his thousands of acres, and his coal-mines, and his quarries, and many incorrect calculations of his income. He was called "The Prince of Dukes," "The Beautiful Duke," "The Duke of Romance." Shopgirls and typists, reading of him and feasting their eyes on his photograph in tube trains on their way to the City, postponed their reading of exciting *feuilletons* to the luncheon hour or the return journey. He was indeed something to dream about.

Many serious people all over the country spoke of the romance of his young life. The gallant father killed in South Africa before he had even seen the lovely boy; and now, on the threshold of a brilliant career, death hovered over the youth, while his famous mother, who maintained the traditions of Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale, watched that dreadful struggle with a breaking heart.

Photographs of Isabel, and of Elizabeth and Mary, once more found their way into the English papers; and throughout the length and breadth of the country champions of the present order of society spoke of the Strettons as a proof that

the newspaper stories of the smart set were grossly exaggerated. Here stood the Old Guard of English aristocracy, good, cultured, and patriotic. They would never surrender to the forces of paganism and vulgarity.

George's arrival at Roquebrune, on account of this publicity, created something of a sensation. Very soon after Isabel and he were settled down in their villa, which had a beautiful garden full of orange-trees shelving down towards the sea's edge, George was called upon by Lord Whaddon, a tall old man who had lived in Monte Carlo for many years.

"I was a guest at DurrIDGE," he explained to George, "when your father came of age. The old duke had been extraordinarily kind to me. It was he, indeed, who persuaded me to leave the army and go into politics. I had only just got my company in the Grenadiers; but I took his advice. I sat for twenty-eight years in the House of Commons, and served the party in a number of minor offices whenever we were in power. Then I took a peerage, and came out here to live. I remember very well a conversation with your father an hour or two before I left DurrIDGE. I asked him if he intended to take up politics, for it was part of my job then to look out for likely youngsters as recruits. He said to me that he could only do one thing at a time; that he didn't believe in a divided life, and that he was going to stick to the land. I was young in those days, and ambitious too. I felt he was wrong. But he was right. The game of politics leads to nothing. It's a case of dust and ashes. A sordid, dull game, and the end, disappointment."

Some days afterwards George returned this visit. The villa of Lord Whaddon was a small one, and rather shabby. The door stood wide open, and in the hall, which was dusty and untidy, were many hats, sticks, and ladies' cloaks, as if a meeting was taking place. While George was mounting the steps, Lord Whaddon came out of one of the rooms and advanced to greet him with a singularly gratified smile.

"Ah, my dear fellow, how delightful of you!"

He was smoking a cigarette in a long tube, and, after greeting George, he took out his case and offered a cigarette to his visitor.

For a moment or two he hovered in the hall, as if wanting to say something, but, eventually making up his mind to postpone this disclosure, he said cheerfully, taking George's arm, "Come and have a whiskey and soda. You'll meet a number of interesting people inside."

They entered the room from which he had issued to welcome George, a long room running from the front to the back of the house, and George found it occupied from end to end by elderly men and women playing cards. On one side was a buffet, with a servant standing there in charge of its numerous bottles.

The air was heavy with tobacco smoke, and, in spite of the windows standing open, the long room was extremely exhausting in its airlessness. George remembered for some years the spectacle made by the grumpy faces of those old, dull people gathered in fours round the baize-covered tables—faces without joy, animation, intelligence, all marked by bitterness, failure, and a soured patience. In what a strange silence these old dullards passed their lives! Even the calls after a deal did not seem to break it. It was like the silence of a sleeping town, or a cattleshed when the cows are afield.

Lord Whaddon told the servant to serve two whiskeys and soda, and then, in a confidential tone of voice, explained to George that taxation had compelled him to turn his house into a bridge club for his friends. "It's wonderful," he said, "how the thing has grown. One tells another, I suppose. In any case, it's a very pleasant, friendly affair. We're quite a cheery little crowd, I assure you."

After some moments he suggested that he should introduce George to a party of players who had just finished a rubber, and were arguing between themselves, rather unpleasantly, about the last game.

"Perhaps you'd like to play a rubber?" asked Lord Whaddon.

"Thanks, no."

"Well, another day then."

George was aware of something oppressively evil in this house, and something offensively second-rate in his host. He decided to get out of the one, and to cut short acquaintance with the other, as sharply as possible. He said curtly, "I don't play cards."

"You amaze me. My dear fellow, you must let me teach you. Not to know auction is to miss one of life's finest pleasures."

"Fortunately there are others."

Lord Whaddon's face, once distinguished for good looks, but now crafty and hard, rather foxy in fact, became suddenly contemptuous. "Perhaps," he asked, "you would like to take a turn in the garden?"

"I should."

"Oh, so you like flowers?"

"I'm devoted to them."

For many months Lord Whaddon made great play among his friends with George's confession that he was devoted to flowers. "I'm devoted to flowers," became a phrase. It was used in a hundred different ways. Whenever a man failed to do anything well he would laugh and say, "But I'm devoted to flowers!" Or, if these people were speaking of a man who had refused the affections of an actress, a dancer, or another man's wife, they would say, "But I understand he's devoted to flowers." So it came about that numbers of joyless and useless old people in the Riviera spread a rumour far and wide of George's namby-pambyishness, and only because he had professed a greater affection for a garden than for a card-table.

Yet his conduct in the South of France did lend colour to the rumour that he was odd. He visited the Casino only for the performances of the ballet and the opera. He ignored the society of fashionable people, and cultivated acquaintance with foreigners who worked for their living. He lunched occasionally at Mont Agel, but never played golf there. He was observed on more than one occasion speaking with great politeness to a girl who sold flowers in the Boulevard du Nord. He was in the habit of waking early and walking into the mountains. He seemed to find pleasure in talking to the peasants of such places as Gorbio, St. Agnès, Castillon, and La Turbie, and no pleasure at all in lunching with Lady — or dining with Mrs. —, both of whom were considered to be as beautifully made-up as they were brilliantly flippant. He much preferred driving to Sospel and Eze to sitting on the Terrace or watching the killing of pigeons.

One day he came back from a walk into the mountains with a certain young Russian, whom he presented to his mother as Prince —, saying that he had invited him to luncheon with them. This young man was cultivated and charming, but somewhat feminine, and Isabel did not like him.

When he had gone she said to George, "I rather deplore your interest in Prince —. I do not feel that he is a man with whom you should be in any way intimate."

"He tells me most interesting things," said George.

"What does he talk about? Russia?"

"Oh, dear, no. He tries to, but I divert him at once.

Hw

There's nothing more tedious than Russia, unless it's Ireland. No, he talks to me about the old women who come to the Café de Paris. Wonderful psychology, I assure you."

"In what way, George?"

"Oh, these old women, some of them as fat as prize cattle, and many of them Jewesses, make impassioned love to these young men. Prince — is engaged to dance there. It's most amusing, the lovesick advances of these old dames. They send presents of jewellery, chocolates, ties, handkerchiefs, socks, cigarettes, flowers, and goodness knows what else. Some of them will even follow a particular boy on his round of the European capitals. They go quite mad. It's a case of autumn passion. Balzac's novels are full of it, but it's diverting to get it first-hand from one of the victims, and quite up to date."

"I rather wish, George, you were not interested in such things."

"My only passion," he replied, "appears to be curiosity. I can assure you I am otherwise a rather detached person. But the odd interests me, and the unknown piques me. It's not a bad amusement. It passes the time and enlarges one's knowledge of the human bug."

Isabel was thinking of these words one afternoon when, in going upstairs to her bedroom, she came upon George talking at his door to a pretty little French housemaid in the corridor. George's smile, his politeness to the girl, and his gentle French words, made a dreadful impression on Isabel's mind. She never spoke to George about the matter, which might have been innocent enough, but it disturbed her for long afterwards. Interest in low people, she told herself, is a symptom of something abnormal in the mind.

When they returned to England in April George was completely restored to health, and Isabel, with a grateful and relieved heart, set about preparing for his coming-of-age celebrations. Two things were uppermost in her mind—to protect him from ambitious mothers, and to get him married as soon as possible to a girl who would bring out all that was good in his character and all that was strong and normal in his exceptional mind.

XII

"OH, by the way, Rose, a friend of mine is coming to tea."

"To-day?" asked Rose Chelford.

"Yes, to-day," answered her brother. "As he happens to be a duke, you had better make some hot buttered toast."

"Or sandwiches of Gentleman's Relish."

"That sounds more consonant. *Gentleman's Relish!* Phoebus, what a name!"

"But, joking apart, Roughneck, who is he, this friend of yours?"

"A duke."

"Nonsense."

"A very young duke, it is true; a callow duke, a fledgling duke, a fluffy and a pimply duke; but still a duke, and a duke of some magnitude. His name's Rothbury."

Rose Chelford asked, "You really mean it?"

"Why not?"

"Then that explains to me," she said, with admirably modulated scorn, "why you didn't shave this morning."

He glanced up from his book. "You, I take it, are going to fly upstairs to change your dress."

She came to him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Do go and shave, Bob. I wish you would. You've no idea how horrid you look with that dark stubble all over your Napoleonic jowl. Can't you keep up your friendship with this baby duke without showing calculated contempt for him? Isn't that rather small, don't you think?"

"I'll shave. To tell you the truth, I'd no idea I hadn't. Now go and make those sandwiches of Gentleman's Relish; I want to read."

"You'll forget to shave. If you go now I'll bring some hot water."

"I must finish this chapter."

"What is the book?"

"Nothing about Shelley; you wouldn't be interested."

She looked over his shoulder and read the title of the book—*The Nature of Man*. "But surely," she said, "you aren't interested in human nature."

"It's by Metchnikoff, an authority on bacteria, microbes, and every species of disease germs; no one better qualified to speak truth about mankind. Run away and tittivate. When I said he was a fluffy and a pimply duke I lied. He's as beautiful as a fashion plate; and he's not engaged to be married."

"You have promised me to shave?"

"If you continue to jabber I shan't have time."

Rose Chelford had grown up in her father's faith. The good doctor of Hoxton came under the influence of Ruskin in his youth, and had proceeded by natural stages to Shelley, Browning, William Morris, the Ethical Society, the Rationalist Press Association, and the Fabian Society. He was a sad student of Ibsen, a tittering disciple of Mr. Bernard Shaw, and a dour follower of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. The mildness with which he cherished his extreme opinions had estranged his son and beguiled his daughter. To Bob, the doctor was a pitiful crank; to Rose, a St. John of the higher life.

She was two years younger than her brother, a brunette who just escaped prettiness without quite achieving beauty. Her chief attraction, apart from an unusually satisfying voice, low, musical, and a little vibrant, lay in the intellectual character of her face—the intelligence of the brow, the thoughtfulness of the dark eyes, and the sad gentleness of the mouth.

This young creature, living in the tragic neighbourhood of Hoxton, had been educated at Queen's College, and had spent almost all her life in London. From her earliest years, therefore, she had been accustomed to sordid and distressing sights, and these things would not have seemed to her in any way unnatural if her father had not surrounded her in their house with the self-conscious artistry of the William Morris school.

Dr. Chelford had endeavoured to shield her from actual contact with the more repulsive aspects of Hoxton. Aware of the sympathetic disposition of her character, he had long assured her that the gigantic cancer of London poverty was far beyond the cure of individual medicine, and needed the surgical operation of State action. But, although Rose believed that this view represented a profound truth, she was often forced into very painful knowledge of Hoxton interiors, and had learned to feel a compassion for miserable and contorted human beings which was now assuming both in her heart and in her mind the menacing shape of a haunting.

"Lend me threepence, Rose," called her brother from the hall. She was preparing the tea-things in the dining-room.

"Have you shaved yet?" she answered.

"Duffer! That's what I want the money for," he explained, opening the door. He entered the room with his hat on his head and in the act of struggling into his top coat. "I'm to meet my little duke at the Alexandra. He's probably waiting there now, very much frightened by the population."

"And you are going to ask him to wait while you are being shaved?"

"That's not a foolish idea. As a matter of fact, I intended to let him kick his heels up on those filthy pavements till I had got myself shaved. It might be interesting, however, to pick him up first, and let him see the inside of a cheap barber's. Good idea."

She gave him the money he had asked for. "You don't really think, Bob, do you, that you impose upon me by your assumption of brutality?"

He smiled as he looked at her, feeling in the pocket of his jacket for pipe and matches. "A prophet is not without honour," he said quietly, "save in the William Morris dining-room of his father's home."

The clock struck five, and still her brother and the duke had not arrived. She was sitting in the drawing-room, the flowers of which she had carefully rearranged, reading a volume of Tolstoy's essays, with a cat in her lap.

She had changed, not only her dress, but her stockings and shoes. She had taken conscious pains with her hair, and more than once, while she was waiting in the drawing-room, she had risen not solely to look out of the window and down the street, but also, before she returned to her chair and the cat, to study herself in the mirror. Yet this anxiety about her appearance was not merely the natural impulse of a young girl waiting to make acquaintance with an unknown youth; she was deliberately conscious of a desire to show her brother's friend that the uncouth and brutal mannerisms of that brother were by no means to be taken as attributes of Socialism. Fond as she had been of Bob in his boyhood, and fond as she still was of him as the son of her father, whom she adored, Rose Chelford had begun to feel something like a real contempt for what she called his "tenpenny-three-farthings Napoleonism."

While she was still waiting for the duke's arrival her father entered the house by the surgery door, attended to three broken-down patients who had been sitting patiently in the back hall for half an hour, and then came to the drawing-room.

"Tea is over, I suppose?"

"No. I'm waiting for Bob." She put down the cat, and rose to greet him.

"Oh, but, my dear child, never wait for Bob."

She kissed him. "You look tired, daddy!"

"I am tired."

"Bob has gone to meet the Duke of Rothbury—one of his Oxford lambs, I understand. They're coming back to tea."

The doctor raised his eyebrows, spread his hands, and smiled. "I once met his mother. She came to the mission years ago. Well, this is interesting. A duke to tea! I hope it won't turn your head, dear Rose!" His beautiful teeth were as beautiful as ever, but the dark moustache and beard through which they once shone were now almost entirely grey. The red tie which he had worn in the early days of his Socialism was now supplanted by one of apple-green.

"What was his mother like?" asked Rose, going to the window.

"As far as I can remember, as unreal as all the rest of those people. Cut out of a book of patterns. But she made no impression on me. I suppose we really must wait for tea. I want mine rather badly. Two babies have come into the world since I last saw you, Rose, and neither of them wanted to come at all. Hard work, but they're here—here in Hoxton. Am I a criminal?"

"You must have your tea at once," she said, going to the door.

"No; let us wait." He caught her by the arm.

"But you shall. I insist."

He looked at her with playful reproachfulness, still holding her arm. "You are never going to develop Bob's rudeness!" he said. "My dear, it would be excessively impolite, I assure you, to begin tea before the arrival of so impressive a guest as a duke." He laughed, and kissed her cheek. "I am looking forward to this experience with the keenness of a razor's edge. We shall see Bob in his most splendid *déshabillé*. What fun it will be to watch him and to listen to him."

While they were speaking in this fashion, an interesting episode was being enacted at the entry to a particularly foul court not a hundred yards from their door. Bob Chelford, for his own purpose, had been showing George something of the extreme squalor and degradation of this particularly atrocious quarter of London. They had not merely looked into dreadful courts and miserable alleys, but had penetrated into one or two tenement houses, where large families squeezed themselves into one room, and where a single tap of water and a single closet, both outside the house, supplied those particular needs of the colony.

George had been depressed on his journey to Hoxton by the increasing narrowness of the streets and the increasing darkness of the atmosphere. Fresh from the wide spaces

and pretty playfulness of western London, fresh, too, from the sight of luxury and general prosperity in his own quarter of the town, he was sharply sensible of the extreme gloom and almost suffocating squalor of this northern wilderness. But until Bob had met him on the greasy pavements outside the Alexandra Trust, and had taken him into black little streets filled with fierce-looking slatternly women and yelling children, he had not realised how frightful was the degradation of London slums, and how appalling the contrast between the life of the rich and the life of the poor.

But even worse was to come ; for Bob Chelford took him inside some of the houses in these warrens. He entered homes without furniture of any kind, and one room in which a woman had just given birth to a child on a spread of dirty sacks. In another home a family of miserable children were using the coffin of their dead father, as it lay on the floor, for a tea-table.

"Tell me," Bob had said, when they set out on their walk, "if you see a pretty face or a healthy body. Keep your eyes open. One never knows. It may be that we shall run across a normal human being ; but they're rare birds. The race, let me tell you, is perishing. Physical degeneration has begun."

Soon afterwards, out of a narrow black court, came a fat and vulgarly dressed woman, much powdered and painted, followed by quite a young girl similarly powdered and painted, although she wore her hair down her back. George started to see such a sight. "What on earth does that mean?" he asked. Bob laughed. "Oh, she's only taking that kid down to your part of the world in order to make a bit of money. She lives at the end of this court, and walks about in a dressing-gown most of her time. She lends money to the poor. Hard as steel ; clever as any company promoter in the City."

As they were returning from one of these dark and mephitic courts, a young man with a soldier's carriage and a face of singular ferocity passed them, with an angry glower for the duke. Suddenly stopping, he called after them an offensive name.

The duke turned round, looked at the youth, who was just moving away with his head over his shoulder, and then walked back to him.

"Why did you call me that name?" he asked, with one of his diffident and placating smiles.

The young man stared at him ferociously, breathing rather hard, and suddenly rapped out, "Where does your money come from? Tell me that?"

"To tell you the truth——" George began ; but the young man, with a pugilistic duck of his head and a threatening movement of his right arm, cut him swiftly short.

"Shall I tell you what you are?" he demanded, his lips trembling, and his small eyes growing swollen with temper. "You're nothing more than a bloody louse and a —— bug, that's what you are! You're a bloodsucker, that's what you are; and all your bleeding friends are the same—blood-suckers, feeding on the poor. Ah, but your game's up! We're going to have a Bloody Revolution in this country. You can grin! You'll grin the other side of your face before long. You wait!"

"Wait and see, eh?" asked Chelford, who had now taken his stand by George.

"Yes, and you won't have to wait very long neither."

"How long do you suppose?" asked Chelford, sucking at the stem of his pipe.

"Ah, go to hell!"

"Stop a minute. Listen to me. Someone's been fooling you."

"No, they haven't."

"And you haven't got brains enough to know it."

"Who hasn't?"

"You used the word revolution just now. How do you spell it?"

The youth was taken aback, but presently answered with great spirit, "Never you mind how I spell it."

Chelford smiled contemptuously and took his pipe from his mouth. "You called my friend a louse and a bug," he said scornfully; "let me tell you this—no bug and no louse in all nature ever makes such a bloody fool of itself as to use words it can't spell, or talk about things it doesn't understand. Don't you know you're as ignorant as one of these grimy bricks here?" He tapped the wall of the entry with the bowl of his pipe. "Don't you know it? What right have you to lay down the law on political economy? Or to open your mouth at all, except to eat? Why, you couldn't grow a potato. You couldn't patch a boot. You couldn't thatch a rick. You couldn't do any damned thing to save yourself from starvation. Who's the louse? Why, you are. My ferocious friend, let me tell you that you are a parasite, preying on men with brains; and you're not fit, believe me, for anything but to carry a load on your back, like a damned donkey. Now, you put that in your pipe and smoke it. It will do you good."

The young man, who had listened to this onslaught with an exasperation difficult to master, an exasperation which might have overmastered him but for the presence of George at Chelford's right hand, and a policeman suspiciously watching them from the opposite side of the road on which this court opened, nodded his head for some moments at his antagonist, and at last burst out with an unprintable objurgation and the following memorable words: "What I'm fit for is to bash your face in, and kick your blasted ribs through your blasted body; and you give me a fair chance, man to man, no belts and no knives, any night you like to name, and I'll serve you same as we're going to serve the toffs and the tarts who are keeping us down. Now then!"

"You make me sick," returned Chelford. "Go and put your head in cold water and see if you can't get rid of some of the blithering rot inside it."

As they walked away, the young man shouting threats after them, George said to Chelford, "If you'll forgive me for saying so, I don't think you handled that young hooligan very well."

"Bah! There are thousands like him. Scores of thousands. You make the mistake of thinking about him as an individual. I think of him as a swarm, a mass, a scum, a sediment. You can't reason with a muck-heap. Get a barrow and cart it away—the whole lot."

But George was dissatisfied. "I should rather have liked to hear what he had to say."

"I've heard it all my life. You'd soon be sick of it. Carrion, carrion! Let's hurry up; we shall be late for tea."

XIII

DURING tea George recounted this incident, much to Bob's evident annoyance.

"I showed him our slums," he explained to his father, "just to give him an idea of London in general, and not only London, but Sheffield, and Newcastle, and Oldham, and every other great city at the heart of this great Empire on which the sun never sets. I wanted him, not only to see greatness, but to smell it, and walk in it, and brush against it. But, fresh from his fairyland, he would persist in seeing every alley and every court as a thing in itself. He gaped and gaped, like a provincial at Madame Tussaud's. We fell in with this particular guttersnipe, and he would persist in thinking of him

as an individual. He could see him only as a man. It shows what a first glance of reality can do in scattering human wits."

The doctor, who resented his son's domineering attitude towards their guest, and who was pleasantly affected towards the young duke on account of George's modesty, good looks, and evident seriousness of outlook—the doctor, it should be explained, had rather expected to meet one of Mr. Bernard Shaw's *flâneurs*—turned to George and said, "My son's view of reality is not mine. What it is I am not able accurately to tell you ; but it is certainly neither mine nor his sister's."

"I thought," said George, "that you were all Socialists."

"What !" cried Bob, bringing his fist down on the table. "I, a Socialist !"

"Heaven knows what he is," smiled the doctor ; "but I am a Socialist, and so is my daughter."

"Then you must be a Communist," said George, turning to Bob. "Is that the solution of the mystery?"

"I think it is safer to say," quoth Rose, with a smile, "that Robert is a party of one."

"I hope I have not alarmed you," inquired the doctor, "by confessing that I and my daughter are Socialists?"

"Not at all ; I am greatly interested." He looked from daughter to father, and back to daughter, letting his eyes rest upon her for a moment.

"Socialism," continued the doctor, "is really nothing more affrighting than political evolution. Humanity began with individualism, which is, of course, disorder and weakness. It proceeded to organisation ; that is, to the family, the tribe, and the nation. It is going on now towards the state. You may remember, perhaps, that we were obliged to resort to State Socialism during the war, in order to carry on our national interests. It is the belief of Socialists that we shall have to resort to Socialism again in order to carry on our industries, and to preserve the structure of civilisation from revolution."

George nodded his head.

"There is really no reason," went on the doctor, "why people should be afraid of the idea of service, instead of the idea of profit, as the impulse of trade and commerce. We have it in science already. Science knows no frontiers. Neither, indeed, does true literature or true art. The Civil Service, moreover, does not need the incentive which actuates Lord Leverhulme and Mr. Selfridge. It is only the shopkeeper who

persists in the heresy that life exists as an opportunity for making one's own livelihood."

Bob said to the duke, "My venerable, ascetic, and benevolent papa is endeavouring to inoculate you with one of the most pestilential notions known among men. If you listen to him you will learn to wear a red tie, to attend meetings of the Ethical Society, to read the tomes of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, and, worst degradation of all, to love your fellow-men; for he is, I assure you, my dear papa, one of the most soothing and convincing propagandists of honey-sweet Socialism now butting their heads against natural law."

"I expect you have discovered," said Rose, "that my brother believes there has been only one great man on the earth——"

"Two," corrected Bob.

"The other is himself," said the doctor with a smile, putting up his fingers to part his moustache.

"No; Julius Cæsar," said Bob.

"The first is Napoleon," explained Rose. "My brother worships the unspeakable torturer of Toussaint L'Ouverture."

"I worship no one," said Bob.

George, who was becoming more and more interested in Rose, turned to her with the suggestion that she should give her definition of Socialism. "As for your brother's opinions," he said, "I have the greatest respect for them, though I don't pretend to understand them—that is, in their majestic entirety."

Before Rose could reply to this invitation the doctor was called from the room. This necessitated farewells between the doctor and the duke. When the three younger people sat down again it was Bob—he had lighted his pipe during these farewells—who began to speak.

"You may understand the difference between my father and me," he said, tilting his chair on its back legs, one hand on the table, the other nursing the bowl of his pipe, "if you care to take the trouble to examine our respective opinions about the attempted Peace of Versailles. My father hates that alleged peace, and believes, because it is unjust—whatever that perplexing word may mean—that it will be provocative of more wars. This is to say, he believes in the possibility of universal peace. Now, I think this Versailles effort at peace is the wretchedest compromise ever fabricated by pusillanimity and nervous greed. The only sensible peace, from the point of view of France, would have secured

the destruction of Germany for a thousand years. It would have been an Old Testament peace, a peace after God's own heart, like the admirable David. Men, women, children, and cattle, would have been put to the sword; cities, towns, villages, and fashionable spas, with their bandstands and gilded hotels, would have gone up in smoke. The French peasants would have taken possession of all the most fertile parts of Germany; the French bankers and financiers would have taken over the ruined cities; and the few Huns left alive would have become their helots."

"He has a beautiful mind," said Rose, stooping to pick up the cat.

Bob brought his chair down on its front legs. "I am perfectly serious," he said, and got up from the table. "The peace I suggest as a sensible peace is certainly the peace to which the Germans, who are the most intelligent people in Europe, would have subjected France, if they had fought her single-handed and conquered her, as they would have done, in three weeks. And we shall live to see the French Empire so treated by the Germans." He began to walk up and down the room. "Twenty years from now, or less, the Huns will be streaming over the Rhine; their flag will fly from the Channel ports, and their Prussian fire-eaters will decorate the Champs Elysées with statues of Hohenzollerns, Prussian generals, Saxon philosophers, and Bavarian poets. It is nature's way. The big thing shoves the little thing aside. Evolution is not toiling to produce a Blind Bartimæus or a lisping Ethical Society; it is seeking a master for humanity and a world of law, order, and high intelligence."

"He is now expounding the gospel according to Nietzsche," explained Rose. "My brother, you must understand, is a man of blood and iron—a young man full of transfused blood and imported corrugated iron."

"Nietzsche," said Bob, "had glimmerings of natural truth, but he had listened too long to Wagner's music not to be blinded by passion and corrupted by sentimentalism."

"I hope you like Wagner's music?" Rose inquired of George. "By the way, won't you smoke? Roughneck will never offer you a cigarette."

"Thanks very much," smiled George; "I will. What I know of Wagner's music—*Tannhauser* and *Lohengrin* in particular—I admire enormously."

She nodded and smiled. "I am so glad. But the oracle, I fear, has not yet ceased speaking."

"Very nearly," said Bob, and took up his parable. "To get sane ideas into our heads, which self-same heads are full of the inherited rubbish of dead superstitions, exploded philosophies, and all manner of political cant and humbugging social conventions, we must rigorously and unswervingly confront natural law. We must, indeed, know nothing else—certainly no ethics from the schools, and no sentimentalisms from neurotic nuns, emaciated monks, half-boiled Baptist tinkers, and social entertainers masquerading as Congregational ministers. We must purge ourselves of all such perilous stuff. When we have done that—those of us who can—we must proceed to bridle the Brute Mob and drive it forward to execute our will. To flatter it, to prostrate ourselves before it, to appeal to it for its suffrages and its kind support—this is to prostitute the human mind to a beast, an unclean beast, and to number ourselves among the lowest lick-spittles of history. Now do you understand?"

George said, after a becoming pause, "It sounds magnificent, but is it war? I mean, how is it to be done?"

Bob answered, "Germany will show us the way."

At this Rose became suddenly pale, almost as if she were overcome by some illness, and, turning impulsively to George, with an appealing look in her eyes, she said to him, "Please don't call it magnificent, and please do not say that it is not war. It is war. And it is not magnificent. Bob will outgrow it. It's really only just a little more than a pose. I think I can explain it. He hates the ugliness of the present system, just as my father does; but my father knows that it is the system he hates, while Bob thinks it is the victims of the system that he hates. Do you see what I mean? My father thinks that by changing the system he can give human nature a chance to improve, and grow naturally to better things. My brother thinks human nature is so evil a thing that it should be bound hand and foot and cast into the prison of absolutism. My father believes in freedom. My brother believes in tyranny. Don't let our Roughneck impose upon you. It—it will spoil you if he does."

Bob laughed, shaking the ashes of his pipe into the fireplace. "Sentiment has had a long innings," he said curtly, "and what a fine muck it has made of things." Then, coming back to the table, and placing his hand on George's shoulder, he added, "You might as well try to stop an electric current with a cigarette-paper as try to stop the triumph of science."

"But who wants to stop the triumph of science?" asked Rose.

"All those who believe in God," replied her brother.

"That is nonsense."

"Quite right. I should have said, All those with brains enough to perceive that science is a decide. How many gods has science slain already, and how many bloodstained altars has it overthrown? Look back. The history of mankind is strewn, thick as leaves in Vallombrosa, with dead gods, broken altars, and rotted scriptures. How long do you suppose it will be before the sentimental God of the Christians falls before the same annihilating power? The Father who sees every sparrow fall! The Father who opens when a man knocks! The Father who gives bread, not a stone, when His children ask! Why, already the war has knocked that preposterous God off His throne, and sent Him hurling down among the trumpets and planchettes of the spiritualist séance. Do you know what they are now saying of the next world? Why, that you may there smoke cigars made of ether! How long can such tosh hold its own before the chemist and the biologist? My dear Rose, if you really think I speak nonsense, if you really are not afraid to look truth in the face, tell me: do you think that any self-respecting man with a grain of intelligence under his skull will go to the spiritualists to find a new God?"

Rose had been watching George's sensitive face all through this utterance of her brother, marking its every change, even the faintest flush under the fine skin, the least movement of the mobile lips, the smallest tremor of the intelligent eyes. She was at once glad and sorry that Bob's fierce words evidently troubled their guest—glad that his mind was not yet cynical and hard, sorry that he should hear such brutal words in her father's house. But at the end she was conscious only of one impression, namely, that whether the handsome duke would ever come to entertain such hard and destructive opinions, certain it was that her brother's personality had already asserted a degree of mastery over his receptive and modest mind.

"When I come to stay with you at DurrIDGE," said Bob, "I'll tell you more. It's a knowledge that has to be gained slowly. Till then, don't let a whisper of Socialism weaken your intelligence. Toryism is your safest creed for the present. Stick to it. But remember what I told you at Oxford. The Tories are the greatest traitors of all history. They submitted where they should have hanged, drawn, and quartered. If they had kept the faith, there would have been no dirty

democracy in England, no dishevelled and useless British Empire sprawling about the globe and babbling of self-determination; there would have been, instead of this, a power in the world ten thousand times more unconquerable than the German Empire before the war, with all the other nations of the earth as its obedient satellites."

He turned to Rose with a smile. "You haven't known till now, have you, what I am driving at?"

"I've always felt," she replied, "that you were losing your heart to the Hun."

He smiled grimly. "Don't you think it would have been better," he asked, "if the young men of 1914 had lost their hearts, and not their lives, to the Hun? Intelligence, Rose, intelligence; that is what humanity needs; not sentiment, not pacifism, not Browning Societies, Ethical Societies, shrieking suffragettes, and the Christian Socialism of excitable curates; no, my child, no; but brains, brains, brains!"

"Take care," she said, "of repeating the same word. It's a symptom of madness. Shakespeare made use of it in *Hamlet*. Words, words, words. Nietzsche, you remember, died mad."

"Did he?" asked George, almost with a start.

Rose nodded to him.

"It was the poison of sentimentalism in his system," said Bob, "the tug of a divided personality. I don't follow Nietzsche. I follow nature, and science is my guide—science who carries a sword and does not talk damned nonsense about disarmament."

"That's what I'm half afraid of," smiled George, turning to Rose, "going off my head! It's so awfully puzzling to know what to believe."

"What, with nature staring you in the face?" asked Bob almost contemptuously.

Rose said to him, "The less you see of my brother the better it will be for your peace of mind."

"But I like him so tremendously."

"I am sorry to hear it."

Bob laughed. "And surprised, too? You didn't know anyone could like such a curmudgeon, did you, Rose?"

She leaned to the duke. "One of the greatest men of the Germany my brother professes to admire said that it was sufficient for a man if he guided his thoughts by the starry universe above and the moral law within."

"The moral law within!" exclaimed Bob contemptuously.

"I don't mind the starry universe above, because it is pitiless, majestic, and sublimely indifferent to Browning Societies and William Morris wallpapers; but the moral law within—God's Blood, where does it come from? From primitive man's terror of the dark, from his craven submission to medicine-man and priest, from his own crafty and funkng desire to enjoy in peace what he had won by pillage, arson, and murder. The moral law, forsooth! Study its pedigree. Talk about Burke's *Peerage*; why, that's a mere nursery rhyme to the scandalous chronicle of the moral law. The conscience! Which shall it be, Rose, the conscience of His Most Catholic and Apostolic Majesty Philip the Second, or the conscience of the Reverend Pigott and his Abode of Love—the conscience of Clemenceau or the conscience of President Wilson? I give you your choice. Tell me where I'm to look for the moral law. Has the Salvation Army got it? Or has the Pope bagged the lot? Is it the moral law of Turkey you're speaking of, or the moral law of the Cannibal Islands? I'm amazed to hear you—you, a pacifist, a hater of war! Why, my dear child, there has been more blood-letting, more massacres, more maiming and mutilating and good honest torturing, over this same moral law of yours than was ever caused by the beauty of women or the ambition of conquerors."

The duke got up. "It's true." He moved towards Rose, who was rising from her chair. "That's really the problem, isn't it?" he asked her with a smile, putting out his hand in farewell. "I mean, how much of our conscience is authentic."

She said, nursing the cat in her arms, "My brother has spoilt your visit for me. I do wish you wouldn't listen to him."

"I've enjoyed my visit immensely. It has been most kind of you to receive me. Thank you so much. May I say I think it's quite wonderful how you've made this house, with its beautiful flowers and pictures, so different from Hoxton? As for your brother's views, they are at least stimulating. They keep one alive. They don't bore. Don't you think they're original and interesting?"

"No. They are fantastic, disruptive, and destructive."

Bob laughed. "That's a very good definition of science—fantastic to fools, disruptive to sentiment, destructive to lies."

"Good-bye," said Rose, looking the young duke in the eyes. The cat had climbed to her shoulder, and she was holding it by her left hand, her cheek resting against its fur.

He returned her frank look with a keener sense that she was invitingly pretty.

"Remember," she said firmly, "it is not a wise thing, or a becoming thing, to let any individual dominate our mind. I think that's a very terrible condemnation of society—'*Most people are other people.*'" She flushed, smiled, and turned quickly away, lifting the cat from her shoulder.

"She is warning Faust against Mephistopheles," said Bob. "Come along. I'll take you to where you can find a taxi. Never go in a bus; they stink of humanity."

XIV

"THAT pretty little girl with the blue eyes and the Brixton accent," said Claughton, as he sat down to dinner at his club with the duke for his guest, "has been asking after you."

"Has she?"

"She calls you her straw-coloured boy."

"How charming of her. Did you dance with her?" asked George.

"Quite a lot."

"She dances well, doesn't she?"

"Not half so well as my Popsy-Wopsy."

"Oh, that red-headed girl from ——" He named a well-known milliner's.

Claughton said that he had told these two girls to stand by for the evening, and that he and George would dance with both of them. He then turned his attention to the wine-list.

"I saw Chelford the other day," said George bending over his soup.

"Oh, did you? I'd almost forgotten him. What's he doing?"

"Waiting for a brief."

"Where did you meet him?"

"I went out to his house. His father is a doctor in Hoxton."

"Where's Hoxton?"

"North of the City."

"Is he still an anarchist, or a Communist, or whatever it is? Have some more toast."

"I don't really know what he is. But apparently he isn't in love with the working classes."

Claughton laughed. "None of these reformers ever is. When Chelford's making a fortune at the Bar he'll be as Tory as all the rest of sensible mankind."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Damn it, here comes Mayhill!"

A young man, rather shabbily dressed in a light grey suit, who walked with a swift yet mincing step, was advancing up the room to their table. He was tall, thin, and square shouldered, with a white face, dead-looking eyes deeply set under a broad forehead, and a thin, selfish, cruel mouth, inclined at one moment to grimace and at the next to a giggling smile. He walked with a noticeable stoop, his small eyes peering about him, the head, which was large and well shaped, jerking suddenly aside whenever he noticed that he was observed. In his right hand he carried an evening newspaper, which he had folded into a narrow scroll and with which he belaboured his right leg as he walked. There was something furtive in his carriage and unhealthy in his look.

Mayhill had established a reputation at Oxford for the kind of cleverness which ranks high among undergraduates. He said extremely rude things to people, uttered startling opinions, took no one else's seriousness seriously, and was known to be curious about a religious movement in the Oxford of his day which attempted to help young men in the physical difficulties of their moral life. He was a Greats man, and had been a power at the Union. Many competent people said of him that he would be a Prime Minister of England.

"Hello, you two!" he exclaimed. "I've just finished dinner. I wish I had known you were coming in. May I sit down?"

"Have a liqueur?" asked Claughton.

"Oh, how generous of you, my Geoffrey! May I have a yellow Chartreuse?"

"You may."

"And how is our dear duke? You look as if you were arrayed, George, either to kill or to advertise your tailor."

"George has been seeing Chelford," said Claughton, after filling the duke's glass with Moselle.

"Chelford? Chelford? Who is Chelford?"

"He was at St. John's. A queer bird. No one understood whether he was a Communist or a Nihilist. I thought you knew him."

"No. Did he ever speak at the Union?"

"He despised the Union."

"How charming of him! From your account of him I imagine that he was just the ass who would make a profound impression upon you."

"You were wise to avoid him," said Claughton.

"Why?"

"He'd have turned you inside out in two minutes."

They drifted into reminiscences which presently touched upon the religious work at Oxford and the man who was conducting it.

"I'm very angry with him," said Mayhill. "He wrote something about my father in a pamphlet, and made him talk about God."

"But I thought your father was a very religious man," said Claughton.

"That's why he never talks about God," replied Mayhill.

The duke smiled. "Then I suppose St. Paul was not a very religious man?"

Claughton laughed. "How good that is! Well done, George. There's nothing so amusing in these days as the assumption of great spiritual reticence on the part of religious people. If a man believes in God, of course he'll talk about nothing else. Of course he will. Chelford would have loved to put you through your religious pacings, Mayhill; and I should have loved to see him do it."

"But you don't suppose I should discuss my religious opinions with a person of that description? My dear Geoffrey, why don't you join the Salvation Army, and serenade your friend Chelford with the big drum? You'd do it awfully well; I'm sure you would. The big drum or the trombone—nothing more delicate than that."

"Well, you see, I'm not a religious man, like you. I'm not at all religious; that is probably why I respect people who really are. The person I can't stand is the man——"

"Now, Geoffrey, Geoffrey! I'm sure you are going to be personal. Don't, I beg you. You're always so painful when you're personal. George is never personal. That's why everyone loves him. When are you coming to dine with us, George? My mother would love to see you again; and I assure you she plays far too much bridge to bother her head about matchmaking; you'd be perfectly safe. Tell me, you're not yet engaged, are you?"

The duke smiled.

"What, with all the pretty girls in London to choose from? You're too busy, I expect, leading this movement for a Brighter London. Geoffrey, I'm sure *you're* engaged. But with you the question must take the form, To how many?"

Claughton replied, "I pity the girl who marries you,

Mayhill. But I rather suspect that the feminine gender interests you only as a titillating speculation."

Mayhill paled. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I notice," said Claughton, "that the generality of young men in these degenerate days, particularly the young men who are careful about the colour of their socks and the length of their hair, are more inclined to eat chocolates with girls, and to titter with them about Max Beerbohm caricatures or the last ballet from Russia, than to handle them as desirable blessings."

"You are, in fact," retorted Mayhill, "a disciple of—what's the lady's name who writes with so nimble a contempt of English grammar about cave-men?"

"No; I'm just an ordinary man. No one, at any rate, has ever said of me that I am a coming Prime Minister."

"How unkind of them!"

"By the way, how soon are you going to make a start?"

"In what direction?"

"Downing Street."

"Oh, you are too kind. There is plenty of time, I assure you."

"And plenty of shabby journalists and broken-down barristers drinking gin and water in Fleet Street who came down from Oxford forty years ago with a reputation for high statesmanship."

"How thoughtful of you to warn me! But you were always noticeable, my dear Geoffrey, for an interest in everybody's mind but your own. I wish, George, you'd encourage him to read. It's a dreadful pity that such a charming façade should have nothing but the popped furniture of other people behind it."

He got up with a laugh, stood looking down on Claughton with a contemptuous smile, and then, with a curt good-night, walked swiftly down the room, tapping his leg with the soiled scroll of newspaper.

"Let's take our coffee here," said Claughton, "in case he should be in the smoking-room."

Half an hour later the young men, who had walked from Claughton's club in Pall Mall, entered the narrow doorway of a house in Soho, and, passing down a lighted and carpeted passage, descended a twisting staircase to the basement. A rose-coloured lamp illuminated this basement, in which a maid and a porter were standing ready to relieve visitors of their cloaks. At the end was a swing door guarded by a negro in uniform. Just inside this swing door was a baize-covered table, at which an official in evening dress was seated,

smoking a cigarette and attending to papers in front of him. The sound of an orchestra came through the swing door.

When George and Claughton entered the dancing-room the music had ceased. Young men were taking girls to tables against the wall, and bringing them refreshments from a buffet in a small curtained alcove. There was a general striking of matches and lighting of cigarettes by these girls, who looked hot and a little dishevelled. One of them, in a yellow frock, had pulled her dress high above her knee, and was inserting a paper into the elastic-tightened end of her knickers, laughing up into the face of a girl friend as she did so. But this friend, who had blue eyes, catching sight of George, exclaimed, "Here's my boy, Poppy, and he's got yours with him. O heart of my heart, if I was to tell you how I dote on you! Isn't he looking lovely to-night?"

The orchestra, occupying an alcove opposite to that in which the buffet was housed, consisted of negroes, who smoked between the dances, called out to the couples during the dances, broke into song whenever they wanted to, and rolled their eyes at any girl who took their particular fancy. They played with great energy, no little skill, and with an evident relish for the primitive sensualism of some of the syncopated music.

Most of the girls in the room came from Regent Street and Oxford Street shops. They were expensively dressed in an exaggeration of the latest mode, and manifestly underfed in consequence of this extravagance in clothes. They were all small, thin, pale, and apathetic. There was not one who looked as if she had ever known, or could have stood up against, a north-easter. It was as if they always lived underground, like a species of human mice, and nibbled nothing but chocolates from morning to night. Most of them cultivated a look of boredom, affected what they believed to be the aristocratic manner of their lady customers, and talked with a drawl all the more comic for their slurred Cockney accent.

George's partner was named Maudie. She lived in Canonbury. Her father occupied a humble position in the General Post Office, and depleted his small income by backing horses. Maudie and three of her sisters were in London shops; her two brothers—mere boys—were employed in City offices. She made more money than most of the girls in this circle because the pathetic character of her face appealed to the more benevolent men who came there, and because she could

talk to them about her domestic difficulties as wistfully as a Roman beggar about his sores.

"My dad's been awful this week," she would say. "He backed Walrus for ten bob Monday, won two pound, put it all on Steve's mount in the Vase, lost it, plunged on Genevieve Wednesday, lost again, and then went all out on Seaweed yesterday. You ought to see my poor mum. Oh, I do think horse-racing is wicked. Don't you? Poor little kids going short of food, and bookies driving about in motor-cars. But"—brightening up, and with the prettiest of her smiles—"I had a bit of luck yesterday. An awful nice boy I was dancing with gave me a box of chocolates, and told me not to open it till I got home, and to be very careful how I carried it. And what do you think was inside it, on top of the chocs? A Treasury note for a whole pound! Oh, I was pleased. I gave it to mum, and she blubbed just like a little kid. It was awful to see her."

While Claughton was dancing with the girl in the yellow frock, whose name was Poppy and who called herself his Popsy-Wopsy—she was of a cheeky and challenging order, sufficiently virtuous in action to escape censure, but with a mind full of a knowingness which she mockingly employed with considerable effect both in conversation and in dancing—while Claughton was bunny-hugging with this Popsy-Wopsy, George was providing Maudie with lemonade, bananas, and chocolates.

She had told him she was so hungry she could hardly stand, but had added, with one of the bravest of her sad little smiles, that she would dance with him even if she fainted in his arms. "And wouldn't that be just lovely for you? You'd have to carry me in your arms. I shouldn't mind if you did. You're an awfully nice kid. Do you know, I'm getting fond of you; I am really. It's very silly for us girls to get fond of boys. I mean rich boys who come here. I suppose you're rich, aren't you? Are you on the Stock Exchange? Somebody told me you were."

George shook his head.

"Have you got a car?"

"Yes."

"A big one, or a little one?"

"It's a thirty horse."

"Is that big?"

"Pretty big."

"I'd love to go in a car. Will you take me one day?"

"With pleasure."

"Could we go right out in the country? I tell you where I'd like to go. Down by the river somewhere. Once I went to Putney for the boat-race—you know, Oxford and Cambridge. I was Oxford. Are you Oxford? Oh, I'm so glad. I'm always Oxford. But Oxford didn't win that year; and, will you believe it, my ribbon curled right up and seemed to go all of a black colour. But I wouldn't take it off. I wore it all the way home. People kept calling out, '*Take it off.*' But I wouldn't. I stick to my colours."

George danced with her six or seven times. In spite of the incredible amount of food that had disappeared into her tiny mouth—a tiny mouth vividly slashed with lipstick and perilously besieged on all sides by scented powder—she felt in his arms as light as sawdust and as brittle as touchwood. She danced the queer dances of the day with a grace that was due not solely to the extreme flimsiness of her body; her dancing, indeed, was a physical and mental development of her castle-building infancy and the dream-life of her early girlhood. It was a form of trance, in which she imagined herself to be no longer a milliner's assistant, no longer one of many shabby inhabitants of a poverty-stricken villa in Canonbury, but a most beautiful lady adored by princes and millionaires, and the cause of terrible family quarrels in the highest families of the land.

Unlike Poppy, who had the mischievous instinct of a monkey and all the natural tricks and detachment of a French courtesan, Maudie seldom thought one intelligent thought while she was dancing. Directly she glided away from her chair in a man's arms it was as if her little Cockney brain had swooned; as if the poor little starved mind had become oblivious of London and the world; as if only the child's heart functioned, and functioned only in the region of dreams. Her pretty eyes would sometimes gaze, almost stare, into the eyes of her partner, but fixedly, without appearing, apparently, to see him at all; while at other moments she would stoop her head to his breast, shut her eyes altogether, and dance without a word.

To George she always felt as a thing with no clothes on, a little Syrinx, so reedlike and insubstantial that she might at any moment escape him—a breath rather than a person, a personality rather than a body. He, too, dreamed as he danced. He preferred this club to the ballrooms of his mother's friends, or to the more fashionable night-clubs,

chiefly because there was no need to talk to the girls who came there to earn a few shillings as dancing-partners. One did not take such girls seriously, and they made no pretence to intellectual interests. It was, therefore, possible for him to dance in a daze, and to dream as he danced that life had no difficulties, and love no horribly disconcerting preliminaries.

"You promise," Maudie said imploringly, searching his eyes, "that you won't disappoint me?"

"Of course I won't disappoint you."

"This Saturday?"

"Yes. This Saturday."

"Two o'clock, and the Marble Arch?"

"Yes."

"Look, I'll be wearing a snuff-coloured dress, stockings to match, and hat the same colour. You'll look out for me, won't you? And I tell you what, I'll wear a green scarf."

"I shall see you all right."

"And you'll wait if I'm a bit late?"

"Of course I will."

"Oh, won't it be lovely—if it really happens!"

XV

THE Countess of Skipton was giving an important dinner-party; nay, but a dinner-party which might be regarded in a few years' time as "epoch-making."

A strong movement among the Conservatives had set in against the Coalition Government. Mr. Lloyd George had not only, in the parlance of the day, "failed to deliver the goods," but he was considered by many people who felt concerned about the moral character of British government to have surrounded himself with second-rate advisers, whose influence, both social and political, was fatal in many subtle ways to that high interest.

On the other hand, there were Conservatives who still held the Prime Minister in the greatest reverence for the part he had played in the war and who firmly believed that this movement to disrupt the Coalition was inspired in no small measure by the industrious hatred with which Mrs. Asquith was credited for the man who had supplanted her husband.

Lady Skipton was one of many ladies in the great world who detested Mrs. Asquith as vigorously as they detested, or ought to have detested, the devil. She was therefore a

supporter of the Coalition. Further, she perceived that among its critics in the Conservative party were nearly all those Cecilians whose ecclesiastical sympathies were with the Anglo-Catholics. To break up the Coalition meant for her the possibility of two dreadful evils—triumph in England of the Roman Catholic Church, or the return of Mrs. Asquith to Downing Street.

Her dinner-party, therefore, was intended to consolidate the Coalition. The presence in London of a distinguished French statesman provided her with a sufficient excuse, not only for inviting a host of powerful people to a reception after the dinner, but for giving so important a party on a Saturday night. The list of her guests, divided into paragraphs according to their rank, occupied considerable space in *The Times* and *Morning Post* on Monday, and warned, as it was intended to warn, the critics of the Coalition of the social forces to which they were opposing themselves.

Isabel regarded this function, to which both she and George were invited, from a purely personal point of view. It would be the first occasion on which the great world beheld her son in a more or less public setting. Many ambassadors and statesmen would see him for the first time. Many mothers with daughters emerging from the nursery would realise that her boy was now a man—and a man destined, surely, to play a distinguished part in the history of his country. What anxieties besieged her at this reflection! She recalled the famous verse in *Adonais* about the contagion of the world's slow stain. George was so pure, so innocent. Would he survive the temptations of wealth and power? Popularity might ruin him. An impetuous affection for some pretty girl without character might overcast his whole career. The test was at hand. Proud as she was of him, Isabel felt sorely afraid.

George was to dine in a few days at Buckingham Palace, and it was believed possible that he would be asked to accompany the Prince of Wales on a tour to one of the Dominions which was then being mooted; but in Isabel's opinion, who did not altogether like the idea of the Dominion tour, this unexpected party of Lilian Skipton's would probably have an even greater influence on his career; he would be brought into contact with many men of almost unlimited power, some of whom, as she well knew, were just then eagerly looking out for young men of promise.

For the first time for many years Isabel took that night inordinate pains with her appearance. The strain of the war,

and her grave worries over Elizabeth and Mary, had stolen away most of her good looks. It was as if animation had left her. There was a notable coldness in her face. The mouth was a little depressed, perhaps even a little hard; the eyes were either austere or indifferent, according to her interest at the moment—they were never bright, they were seldom alert. Greyness had invaded her hair; crow's feet were showing at her eyes. But brilliant diamonds and a rich dress gave to that faded and sad face, she still held herself with an impressive dignity, a certain attractive splendour. No one any more would look at her for her beauty; but few could now ever see her on a state occasion without realising that she stood for something great and perhaps defeated in English life.

During her toilet, and only a few minutes before she would be setting out for this dinner-party, the maid who attended to her was called from the room. When she came back it was with the disconcerting news that the duke had not yet returned. Isabel could hardly believe these tidings. George knew—for she had discussed the matter with him only last night—what great importance she attached to this party.

"Is there no telegram—no telephone message?" she demanded, turning from the brilliantly lighted glass with a swiftness which made the diamonds in her hair flash like a swarm of fire-flies.

"No, your Grace."

Isabel, still facing round on her chair before the looking-glass, inquired if the butler knew where George had gone.

"His Grace said he would not be back to luncheon, and went out in his car, your Grace, just before one o'clock."

Isabel sent for the butler, who was waiting mournfully outside the door of her room, with George's valet at a convenient distance in case he also should be summoned.

Nothing more than the maid had told her could be learned about George. Lady Skipton was rung up on the telephone. She said it was a nuisance, but that Isabel was to come alone, leaving a message for George to say that Lilian expected him to attend her reception.

When the car, in which poor Isabel drove all alone, drew up at the pavement's edge in Grosvenor Square, there was already a considerable line of carriages waiting to set down their guests at Lilian's house. As she sat there, looking from the window towards the distant awning which stretched from the lighted porch to the kerb, two tall men in amused conversation—for they were smiling—passed her car. They

were walking with easy strides, their hands in the pockets of their coats, their hats pressed over their eyes. She recognised them as champions of the High Church party, and knew that they were ranked in the House of Commons among the sceptics concerning an immediate attack on the Coalition. She thought how clever it was of Lilian to include these devout Anglo-Catholics in her party; to sacrifice, as it were, her Protestantism on the altar of her patriotism; but, after all, was not this sacrifice a tribute to what people called Jesuitism? She found herself wondering whether George would not be safer from the contagion of the world's slow stain (that adjective *slow* haunted her) if he too felt the spiritual devotion which inspired these two intellectual Anglo-Catholics.

She watched them push their way through the group of people standing by the roll of carpet, and go up the steps to Lilian's house, saluted by the policeman in charge of the small crowd. The light fell on the ascetic profile of the taller man, and Isabel asked herself, as her car went forward once again, how it was that this particular sweetness of expression so seldom could be seen in the faces of Protestants. Something sad and desolate in her heart seemed to be telling her that it was crying for an altar at which it might lay down all its burdens.

She heard her name spoken by the spectators on either side of the carpet as she alighted from her car and moved towards the steps. A woman exclaimed, "What lovely diamonds! I thought she was the Queen, I really did." A girl on the other side of the crowd said to a friend, "All by herself! No man to look after her!" Under the porch a famous Cabinet Minister was loosening his coat and bending down to talk to his sister. Over his shoulder he caught sight of Isabel, and hastily pulled off his squash hat, and descended a step to greet her, smiling and bowing, and showing his teeth. He led her up the steps with an extravagance of ceremony, paying her the great court which he paid to everyone in public and to no one in private.

Several people were going up the stairs when Isabel crossed the hall, which was brilliant with lights and flowers. She recognised among them one of the few generals who had really distinguished himself in the war, and a Liberal mountebank who had climbed into the embraces of aristocracy after a career equally divided between vilifying them and pushing his own fortunes.

A voice hailed her. "Oh, duchess, how glad I am to see you!" She turned about to find Lady Mayhill at her side. "But where is the duke?"

Isabel replied, "He is coming later," and bowed to young Mayhill, who was edging up to her at his mother's side, looking very pale and self-conscious, but evidently on the watch to say something brilliant and startling.

They went slowly up the grand staircase, the Conservative statesman treating young Mayhill with a charmingly paternal manner, his sister walking with Isabel.

A sensation in the hall caused them to glance down. The French Minister had arrived with the French Ambassador. Even the greatest people on the stairs stopped in their ascent and leaned over the balustrade to watch the scene below. The Frenchman, who was just then surrounded by footmen, was talking with the pace of a machine-gun to the Ambassador, while his hard eyes shot lightning glances from right to left of him.

"Not a particularly effective way," tittered young Mayhill, indicating the general splendour of Lilian's house by a wave of his hand, "to convince monsieur that we are nearly ruined, and should be grateful to France if she paid her debts."

The Cabinet Minister at Isabel's side whispered into her ear, "He always reminds me of a saying by Lord Acton about France rushing down *the entire cataract of deductive logic*."

His sister murmured, "A very formidable eye!"

Someone just above her said to a friend, "Wonderful how much high explosive can be packed into a tiny parcel!"

Isabel was soon near the drawing-room doors, and went forward into that great apartment, which was extraordinarily impressive although entirely undistinguished by taste. Many other people on the stairs, however, drew aside to let the little French Minister pass, so that he mounted to the drawing-room between women who stood like statues against the tapestries on the wall, and men who stood like waxworks against the carved marble of the balustrade. His hard, bright, prominent eyes glanced to right and left of him at these English people, and he bowed to them without grace, and muttered "*Pardon*" without sincerity, as he ascended with business-like alacrity and a noticeable stertorousness of breathing, followed by the tall, handsome, and elegant Ambassador.

Lady Skipton, looking more like the Queen of Frogs than ever, beaming with great satisfaction, and blazing with magnificent diamonds, gave Isabel the friendliest of greetings. She had time to say in her loud and affectionate voice how

disappointed she was at George's absence before she turned her smile and her hand to the distinguished Conservative statesman and his sister. Lord Skipton, red-faced, watery-eyed, and very erect, who always suggested the racecourse or the covert-side, and who looked just then as if he had quite recently drunk a strong brandy and soda in the gun-room, smiled rather knowingly at Isabel as he said, "I don't blame George. I am sure he's enjoying himself far more than I am."

Wherever Isabel moved in that crowded room she was met by inquiries about George, and in every case she answered them by saying, as if it had been a pre-arranged matter, that he was coming to the reception. But she was more and more conscious of distress and anxiety; she found it hard to take an interest in anything about her, even when a stir in the room announced the arrival of the Prime Minister. But something said of the Coalition's chief by a really great man close at her side suddenly gave an entirely new turn to Isabel's thoughts.

"Wonderful little man!" said this famous person. "In the very darkest days of the war I never found him in the least degree daunted. He has got the courage of a lion."

Isabel thought, "What is my anxiety in comparison with the dark days of the war?" and looked at England's Prime Minister with pride and satisfaction as the little hump-shouldered man advanced into the room. His hair was white, and his face blanched; but those mysterious grey eyes of his had the secure and charming smile of a cheerful boy and an unconquerable man. The silvery tones of his voice reached her ear, gay and friendly, yet how quiet and restrained! With what easy pleasantness he greeted everyone, even those who he must have known were his enemies; and how utterly free from anything in the nature of servility or even of gratitude was his reception of greetings from the great and the powerful. Wherever he stood became the centre of the room, and as she looked at this long-haired and high-shouldered little man, with the puckered smile and the haunting voice, Isabel felt uplifted and proud, as though his strength and courage rebuked her poor, selfish disquiet.

She became almost her old self. She talked earnestly to a Cabinet Minister on whose arm she went down to dinner about the need for a crusade of patriotism in the country, and said that she would like to take part in organising a campaign of this nature—almost a religious campaign, she called it—so that the wonderful, sacred, and unifying spirit of the war might not be lost.

And yet, while she talked in this vein, she had eyes for all the dresses in her neighbourhood, eyes for the manner in which the guests had been arranged, eyes, too, for Lilian's flowers, and a mind sufficiently detached to consider even the composition of the dinner.

This Minister was in a lugubrious mood. He told Isabel that he did not think the present social order would last a decade. He spoke of Bolshevism in Russia, of the growth of Socialism in the Labour party, of the slump that was beginning in British trade. "It is hard work," he said, "to keep a party together which is pulling in two different directions; but it is harder work still to keep a country in existence which is divided against itself."

Isabel roused herself to fight such destructive pessimism. She told the Minister what her brother had said to her concerning England's opportunity to capture foreign markets. He smiled grimly. "Your brother," said he, "evidently does not know that Labour is opposed to any such selfish behaviour on the part of the British working classes. We are all to do what the International tells us to do. They have only one real object, duchess, and that, I assure you, is not the prosperity of British trade."

"What is it?" asked Isabel.

"The destruction of what they call Capitalism."

Isabel began to think of George. He must be roused to take a part in the great struggle of which this Minister was speaking. . . .

Soon after the reception had begun, and while she was standing in Lilian's neighbourhood, her eyes watchful for George's appearance, a footman came to Lady Skipton and told her that Mr. Aylmer Montgomery begged to be allowed to speak to her ladyship for a moment. "Oh, ask him to come up," said Lilian very cheerfully, for she knew now that her party was a brilliant triumph. She turned to Isabel and said, "Isn't that interesting? I forgot to ask Aylmer—how, I can't imagine—and he has had the good sense to ask himself. Ah, my dear, he can never be happy out of your neighbourhood!"

Isabel could not quite understand what was intended to be conveyed by these words. They brought a sudden colour to her cheek, and distressed her. She turned away from Lilian Skipton, making room for the surge of arriving guests, and thought over those strange words.

A very old nobleman, once a famous sportsman, who leaned

heavily on a stick, and could now only walk by shuffling his feet along the ground, stopped Isabel, and began to talk to her. "There's one person you and I are missing badly," he said. She started a little. "Dear Arthur Hawthorne," continued the old man. "Ah, duchess, what a loss to his country the loss of those keen eyes of his! He would have been in the van of this fight for good, strong, constitutional government—a thruster, a great thruster. We must stick together; all the Constitutionalists; these Red fellows will split us if we don't; and then good-bye to the British Empire and to European civilisation. What do you think," he asked in a lower voice, "of Lilian's taste in asking the fellow who owns the —?"—naming an unspeakable Sunday newspaper. "Ah, my dear duchess, we've got some queer stable-companions just now. I wonder what Arthur would have said to that nasty gentleman if he had come across him. I tell you one thing: Arthur wouldn't have treated dear Violet Douglas-Pennant as these confounded friends of ours are treating her. What a scandal that is! How he'd have kicked out of his way that foul-mouthed little counter-jumper over there who has become a power behind the throne. Our captains are a precious shabby lot. But we've got to put up with them. For the sake of the country we must make shift with them. Still, it's a great humiliation for most of us. It goes against the grain to think that England has got into such hands. But I mustn't detain you. Someone is waiting to speak to you. I will make my way to the wall. I get in people's way, and I'm afraid of being knocked over, too. That's one of the disadvantages of being a little fellow." At last, Mr. Limer's voice sounded in her ear. "I want to speak to you, Isabel."

She brought her head round to him with a somewhat studied expression of indifference in her eyes; but all of a sudden those sad eyes of hers became quick with alarm. She took No. 1's arm, drew him aside, and demanded, "What is it? Tell me at once."

He said to her, "It is nothing serious; but I thought you ought to know about it with as little delay as possible. George has met with an accident."

"Is he hurt?"

"Not seriously."

"You mean that?"

"Oh, yes; it's not really serious."

"Where is he?"

W

"At home."

"You are sure he is not seriously hurt

"I don't think it's serious."

"What was the accident? I must go to him at once."

"A collision with another car."

"Not seriously hurt—you are sure?"

"I feel sure he will be all right."

"Let us go."

"I have got your car at the door."

Mayhill, who was hovering round Isabel, caught scraps of this conversation. "Did I hear you say that George had been hurt?"

Isabel nodded, and passed on. But Mayhill walked beside Montgomery, and got out of him the news that George had been involved in rather a bad motor smash. For the rest of the evening Mayhill circulated in those crowded rooms, asking people if they had heard of the Duke of Rothbury's accident.

On their way back to Belgrave Square, Montgomery said to Isabel, "I am sure you have no reason in the world to be anxious about George. The doctors who have seen him are perfectly satisfied that he will get over it. But, unfortunately"—Isabel turned cold—"this accident has involved someone else."

"What are you going to tell me?"

"Something unpleasant, and you must take it coolly."

Isabel thought hard. The brilliance of Lady Skipton's party had gone out for her like an exhausted lamp. She was now in the midst of slumlike darkness, through which amorphous creatures were moving ominously, and yet with a complete indifference to her existence. She was conscious of a coldness that penetrated to her bones, and yet of a hand, bloodhot, that pressed upon her forehead. Something unpleasant! The foundations of her life were sensibly breaking up under her feet. What was the real news that Aylmer had to break to her? "Someone else!" she said. Then, looking quietly out of the window at the lights and trees of the Park, she asked, "You aren't going to break my heart, are you?"

Montgomery replied, "Oh, no. You and I are not at all likely to make a mountain out of a molehill. A girl is involved in the matter. It seems——"

"Is she killed?"

"No; but rather badly hurt."

"Yes?"

"She begged George to take her for a drive in his car. He had danced with her. I understand they met in a club. She appears to be a professional dancer."

"Oh, that type of girl!" She did not laugh, but the tone of her voice very effectively expressed an extreme of ironical mirth.

"Yes," he replied reprovingly.

"I knew he went to dance-clubs."

"Of course; and there's no reason why you should not have known that he was taking this particular girl for a drive."

At this she did laugh. But Montgomery only noticed that she was beating with her foot on the floor of the car.

"I believe what George tells me," he said.

"What does he tell you?"

"That he pitied this girl; that she is poor, hard-working, and good."

"Oh, well, that is something, isn't it?"

"She wanted to see the country. She has lived all her life in London. She works in a shop."

Again Isabel laughed.

"I think you are unreasonable, Isabel."

"Do you?" she asked. "Do you, really? Ah, well, you don't know how dearly I have loved him."

"You are thinking that he is——"

"I am thinking, Aylmer, that no man who is worth his salt ever cared in any way for a woman he couldn't respect. But, then, I have lived all my life among great things and true things. My father was a man of honour. All my brothers were as straight as lances. You know what Herbert was. At least, I hope you did. *Sans peur, sans reproche*. However, one must adjust one's mind in these days to other standards. I am glad George is not badly hurt. I hope the little shopgirl will recover. Was he unconscious?"

"No. It's a question of a cut."

"Glass!"

"Yes."

"Where is the cut?"

"Rather near one of his eyes."

"I may see him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did he ask for me?"

"At once."

"But for you first!"

"In order that I might break it to you."

Iw

"Exactly. How good you have been, Aylmer."

"The accident happened near Laleham. The doctor telephoned to me from there. I hurried back after I had seen George in the hope of catching you before you started out for dinner. You had just gone when I arrived."

"He followed after you?"

"Yes."

"Were the girls at home when he arrived?"

"I don't know. I haven't been there since. I telephoned to ask if he had arrived, and Wilkes said he was in bed; and that the doctors had just left, quite satisfied, and ordering that he was not to be disturbed."

"You realise that this means a scandal?"

"Oh, I don't think so."

"Of course it does. A scandal at the outset of his career. How stupid of me! Do you know, I was thinking quite great things for him as I dressed for Lilian's party. Well, here we are. Come in, Aylmer; there's something I want to say to you."

He put his hand on her arm, detaining her. The footman had got down from the front of the car, and was going round the back of it to ring the bell at the door.

"If you think," said Montgomery, "that George is developing the tastes of Elizabeth and Mary you do him a very grave injustice. I will stake my life that he is as straight a man as his father, and as wholesome a man as any now living. You will disappoint me dreadfully if you doubt his honour for a single moment."

Isabel, who had been looking towards the front door through the window of the car, turned her head to him and said, "Thank you, Aylmer. That helps. Come in, and let us see how he is."

XVI

SOON after the front door had been opened, Elizabeth and Mary appeared in the hall from the drawing-room upstairs. They were dressed in knitted jumpers and tweed skirts, with felt hats on their heads and thick shoes on their feet. Both of them were smoking.

"He's asleep," said Elizabeth, in a cold and business-like tone of voice.

"He's going to be quite all right," added Mary, in a gentle tone.

Isabel asked them if they had seen him.

"Oh, rather!" replied Elizabeth. "We were here when he arrived. We've had a great jaw about the whole thing."

They went up the stairs together, Isabel first, Mary following, Elizabeth side by side with Aylmer.

"He tells me you were perfectly ripping, Aylmer," said Elizabeth, turning her face to Montgomery and putting her cigarette to her lips. "His *ipsissima verba*, if you care to know them, were, 'A. M.'s the best bloke in the world for a crisis'—or words to that effect."

He smiled and said nothing.

"You'd better have a brandy and soda. You look like the white flower of a blameless life. These things, I know, unnerve all except the really hot stuff of the human race. Poor old Aylmer!"

As they entered the drawing-room, which was blazing with light, Isabel turned round to the switches and put all the lamps out save those near the fireplace. The girls took this as a reproof, and exchanged a knowing look; but Isabel was not thinking of economy when she switched off those wasteful lights.

She sat on a sofa at some little distance from the fireplace, still wearing her cloak, but thrown open, so that the diamonds in her dress flashed as brilliantly as those in her hair. Aylmer occupied a low arm-chair on the same side of the room and not far from the sofa. Mary had "squatted" on the hearth-rug, Elizabeth was sitting on the arm of a chair opposite Isabel, close to a table on which there was a tray set out with decanters, glasses, and cigarettes.

After the girls had been thoroughly cross-examined on the report of the doctor, Isabel asked them, coldly and almost bitterly, if they knew anything about the condition of the girl who had been involved in the accident.

"Oh, she'll be all right," said Elizabeth.

Mary glanced up at her sister. "Well, she's much worse cut about than Porgy." Then, looking over to her mother, she said, "Poor little Maudie got it in the neck, and not metaphorically either. As a matter of fact, she jolly near had her head cut off."

"Do you mean," asked Isabel, very slowly, and in a voice that chilled them all, "that this girl may die?"

Mary shook her head, staring with curious fascination at the awed and stricken face of her mother.

Elizabeth said off-handedly, "She'll survive all right. Mary always exaggerates. That's her only vulgarity."

There was silence for some time. Then Isabel turned to Aylmer. "We must find out where she lives. We must——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Elizabeth. "Mary and I have been out to see her."

"That's why we haven't changed our things, mummy," explained Mary.

"You've been out to see her! But do you know this girl?" demanded Isabel.

"George told us about her when he got back," said Elizabeth, "and we asked the Laleham doctor who brought George home to give us her address. You see, we both thought it would be a rather decent sort of thing to go out and inquire about her."

"She lives in a place called Canonbury," said Mary.

"It took a bit of finding to get there."

"Her mother is a really good soul," added Mary.

"How did she take it?" Isabel inquired.

"Oh, splendidly," said Mary. "All the hysterics were over before we arrived. Papa was a bit drunk, but not in celebration of the event, I imagine, for he looks as if most of his leisure is devoted to the bottle. He was quite all right, too."

"What do you mean by that?"

"She means," explained Elizabeth, "that he won't make any extravagant claims, won't kick up a fuss."

"His main anxiety," smiled Mary, "was to convince us that his little Maudie was as chaste as we are."

"I really think we put the fear of God into him," said Elizabeth.

"You'd hardly have known us, mummy," laughed Mary, "we were that hauteurish and benevolent! He kept calling us 'your ladyships,' and once or twice he even seemed as if he wanted to give us the glad eye."

Elizabeth laughed. "That's perfectly true. It was really rather funny. He kept telling his wife she had better go upstairs and see how Maudie was getting on, winking at us over her head."

"He offered us some whiskey! He's rather like George Robey on the stage."

"We told him," said Elizabeth, "that you would like to be responsible for all the expenses, if he would kindly allow it, and that we should call early to-morrow to see how Maudie was."

Mary laughed. "I said to him, 'I hope you won't think us irreligious to come to you on Sunday instead of going to

church.' He said he never went to chapel himself, but he threw no bricks at those who do. He told us with Asquithian solemnity, steadying himself on the edge of a hiccup, that his motto is 'Live, and let live.' Bess said to him that she could see he had lived all right. That bucked him up wonderfully."

"We also suggested," said Elizabeth, "that it would be better not to make too much fuss over the matter if reporters should come from the newspapers. We said we thought you wouldn't like that sort of thing, as you were old-fashioned and didn't advertise yourself like the smart set."

Aylmer, who was not given to gesture, nodded his head with sagacious approval.

"You seem," said Isabel, "to have thought of everything. But, of course, it will get into the newspapers."

"As a matter of fact," said Elizabeth, "we have spent most of the evening in entertaining reporters and answering telephone calls from newspaper offices."

Isabel glanced at Montgomery, and then brought her eyes, which were full of dumb suffering, once more round to Elizabeth. "What did you tell them?"

"Oh," replied that young lady, flinging her cigarette into the grate, "we pitched the same tale to all of them. We said Maudie was a friend of ours; that she had been run down for some time; that her mother had spoken to us about her ill-health; and that we had asked our brother——"

"Because we had a golfing engagement at Addington," interrupted Mary.

"Yes, because we couldn't do it ourselves, to give her a run in the country. We told them that Canonbury really belonged to our district, and that his Grace chiefly confined himself to Hoxton, but that on this occasion——"

"Chuck me a cigarette, Bess," said Mary, hitting Elizabeth on the knee. She then looked across to her mother, while she held out her open hand for the cigarette which Elizabeth was reaching to take from the box on the tray, and said, "We made out that our acquaintance with Maudie's family arose out of our work during the war, and that there are scores of similar families all over London with whom we are still on very affectionate terms."

Isabel made a great effort. "And did they believe you?" she asked.

The two girls looked at each other.

"I think they did," said Elizabeth.

"All except one," added Mary, striking a match. "We must be truthful."

"Yes, there was a little blighter from the ——" (Elizabeth named a particularly disagreeable Sunday newspaper)—"a really nasty little cad he was—who tried to insinuate something unpleasant."

"Bess's handling of that little worm," interrupted Mary, "was very nearly It. I was proud of you, Bess darling; I really was."

"You have no idea of the heights I can reach when I'm all out," said Elizabeth, striking a match.

Mary looked across at her mother, tucking her feet more securely under her, and taking the cigarette from her lips with one hand, while with the other she waved away the smoke from before her face. "This little reptile told Bess that he understood Maudie was a very alluring lady, or words to that effect. Bess looked at him till he turned green, and then rang the bell. 'What is your telephone number?' she demanded. He gave it like a lamb. In came Wilkes. Bess told him to get the number, and to say that Lady Elizabeth Stretton wished to speak to the editor. When Wilkes had gone she turned to the worm and said, 'I have nothing more to say to you; but you had better stay and hear what I am going to tell your editor.' Then she and I talked about golf. The call came through. Bess sat down on the edge of the table, the instrument in her lap, and spake as follows: 'I am Lady Elizabeth Stretton. One of your reporters is here about his Grace's accident this afternoon. He seems to imply that there is something unsavoury in the matter. I have told him that his Grace was giving this poor girl a two hours' run in the country at my request purely for the good of her health, and as a part of our general work among those who have suffered in one way or another from the war. I don't think he believes me. I have therefore rung you up to say that if anything appears in your newspaper which suggests what this reporter has had the insolence to suggest to me my mother will most certainly proceed against you for libel.' The reporter jumped up, expostulating and all the rest of it. Bess just put down the telephone, got off the table, and said to him, 'Now you can clear out.' It was all very tophole."

Montgomery said, "I congratulate you, Elizabeth."

Isabel inquired if the editor of that newspaper had said anything in answer to her message.

"He tried to break in while I was speaking," said Elizabeth, "but I kept on, and rang off directly I had finished."

"But he has twice rung us up since," said Mary.

"What for?"

"Oh, I suppose," said Elizabeth, "to apologise."

"We told Wilkes to say that her ladyship had nothing more to add to what she had told him," explained Mary.

"Even if he does print anything shabby," said Elizabeth, "it won't matter a tinker's curse. It's a paper that's only read by the *canaille*. Aylmer, you're looking played out. You had better ooze home to bed. These matters are upsetting to the middle-aged."

"They're like the late lamented war," added Mary, "only to be handled adequately by the very young."

Isabel said that she had asked Montgomery to come in to discuss this matter of the newspapers, and as the girls had apparently dealt with it already there was no reason why he should stay any longer. She apologised for all the trouble they had given him, and thanked him for what he had done in the matter.

"I'll see you out," said Elizabeth, and accompanied Aylmer from the room.

When the door had shut, Mary looked across to Isabel, and said, "Mummy, Bess asked me to stay because she thinks I am better at sob-stuff than she is. She wanted me to say for both of us that we're awfully sorry for you about this mishap, and that we'll do anything we can to put it right. We both know that we must offend you a good bit. It's the war that made us rather hard. But we're both excessively fond of you, and we shall always be jolly grateful for all you've done for us. And so, mummy dear, we hope you'll let us be friends with you, in spite of our bad manners."

Isabel replied, "I am seeing you both in a new light. I don't profess to understand you, Mary, but I realise that I have not been altogether fair in my judgment about you. We will try to be better friends."

"Thanks, mummy. That's jolly handsome of you, and it's all we ask."

"But one thing I must say," said Isabel, getting up from the sofa.

"Yes?"

"It covers me with shame from head to foot to think that if we escape a scandal it will be because of the lies which you and Elizabeth have told to these reporters."

Mary drew back her head and pursed her lips. "Would you call them lies?" she asked, thoughtfully rather than reproachfully.

"Don't you know they are lies?"

"No; because everything we said was founded on truth."

"For instance, that this girl is a friend of yours?"

"Well, she is now. Bess and I told the parents we intended to take her under our wing."

"Your brother's honour has been saved, if it is saved, by iniquitous lies. You must know that. Not to know it argues in you a terrible state of moral chaos."

"Mummy dear, you are awfully, *awfully* hard!"

"Still, I don't want to leave you with the idea that I am ungrateful. I am exceedingly grateful to you. You have both behaved very well in this dreadful matter; according to your lights, you have behaved admirably; I am grateful to you both. Tell Elizabeth that. Tell her also what I feel about the lies which have been told; be sure you do that; but tell her I am grateful. Now we had better go to bed."

Mary scrambled to her feet, and went over to Isabel with an appealing look in her eyes. "I want you to say good-night properly," she said.

Isabel wavered for a moment. Then she kissed the child, and said, "I don't understand you, Mary; I hope it is not my fault; I should like——"

"It's the war, mummy. Strafe the war for everything, and you'll be perfectly safe."

The door opened, and Elizabeth came in.

"I just wanted to say," she said, as Mary and Isabel drew apart, "that I don't think, mother, you ought to go out to Canonbury to-morrow. I think you ought to stick to your pedestal just for the present. Mary and I will drive out after brekker with flowers and fruit, and we can give the mother your kind sympathies, *et cetera*, and see how the land lies. Do you agree?"

Isabel said, "Come here, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth advanced towards her mother suspiciously.

Isabel put her hands on the girl's shoulders, kissed her cheek, and said to her, "Mary will tell you what I have said to her. I am very grateful to you both."

"But don't you think," Elizabeth persisted, "that I am right about you not going out to Canonbury just yet?"

Isabel replied, "I will be guided by you, Elizabeth."

XVII

EARLY one morning in May Isabel and George set out by motor-car for a visit to Glantingham. They were to stay with the Hawthorpes for a week-end, and then to continue their journey to Durridge.

Isabel had looked forward to this excursion with considerable pleasure. She was both harassed in mind and tired in body. She had been conscious every morning since George's accident of a nostalgia which made it something of an irritation to wait for the day of departure. She had discovered that her heart was crying out for Durridge, and that her mind had grown mutinous against the demands of London.

She had told herself that on the road George would no doubt speak openly to her of his entanglement with the dancing-girl, and she comforted herself with the hope that he would the more willingly listen to her good counsel concerning his future because of this unfortunate catastrophe.

But George set out on this journey in no lively spirits, and with no show of his usual affection. He had been moody ever since his accident. He had discouraged his sisters when they talked about Maudie, and told them that he didn't wish them to cultivate her acquaintance. His mother found him unwilling to talk about anything except the news in the papers or the books that he was reading. When she had proposed this visit to Durridge he replied that he would do anything she wished. It had appeared to Isabel, and also to Elizabeth and Mary, that he was suffering from the depression of repentance. Chelford had come to see him, at George's own particular request, and Isabel had felt that this was further evidence of George's unfortunate taste for second-rate people. After Chelford's visit George had seemed to be more depressed than ever.

"Have you ever noticed," he asked Isabel, when the car was north of the Park, "how quickly one gets into the slums? London is really a city of horrible shabbiness. Even its centre is getting more and more vulgarised. But look at these houses. They are as bad as anything in Whitechapel, and almost as bad as some of the streets in Hoxton. Grimy little beasts of houses, aren't they?"

"People tell me," said Isabel, "that there are districts in London, occupied thirty years ago by merchants and clerks, which are now, because the working classes have swarmed into them, as dirty and untidy as slums."

"Yes, I know. Kennington and Clapham on one side, Camden Town and Islington on the other."

"We shall soon be out of London, however."

"I'm afraid not. It is a sprawling great place. Aren't these roads a disgrace?"

"They are, indeed. But I suppose one cannot expect good roads in districts like this."

"The Mall is just as bumpy. Everything in England seems to be badly done. Isn't it queer, too, how seldom one stops in London, except in the parks, to admire anything for its beauty? And yet, as the capital city of a great Empire, it ought to be a splendid affair. Aylmer says that a nation which could go to war singing about Piccadilly and Leicester Square is in a bad way. By Jove, I think he's right. We're rather a shoddy lot. I had a talk with Claughton last week about English character. We came to the conclusion that everything splendid and thorough began to slump in 1850. What do you think about it?"

She had wanted to delay her appeal till trees and hedges were reached and buses and lorries left behind; but here, surely, was an opportunity too good, because so natural, to be neglected.

Isabel began to speak, with the roar and the mess of the suburbs all about her, of the part which aristocracy can play, and ought to play, in a modern democracy. She said that if England's glory was beginning to wane, the cause, in large measure, was the sin of those who set the nation a bad example in manners and morals.

"That is why I am so anxious," she said to him, "that you should never associate with questionable people. All your influence must be on the side of wisdom and goodness. I hope, dear, you will set your face like a flint against the vulgarities and excesses of the smart people, who behave as if life had no duties and wealth no responsibilities."

"You are inviting me," he said with a smile, "to play the part of Dame Partington."

"We can all do something to help our fellows."

"I think there's a tide coming along," he said slowly, "which will sweep us all away, and all our little brooms as well. You must have another talk with Chelford when he comes to DurrIDGE."

"I don't like him," said Isabel, "and I don't understand him."

"He's a queer fellow, but a deep thinker."

"He says he isn't a Socialist, and yet he appears to be always girding at the present social order."

"I know. He takes some understanding. But I think I know why he makes a mystery of his political opinions. I fancy he is waiting to see which way the political cat will jump. If the Conservatives get into power he will stand for Parliament as a Conservative; but if the Communists capture the Labour party he will join them."

"That's very dishonest!"

"In the meantime he is preparing himself to be a windbag. The man of destiny, he says, must be a master of phrases. But you mustn't call him dishonest. His idea is to destroy the democratic theory. As long as that can be done, he doesn't care who does it. He wants to master the mob; that is the only way to political salvation; and he thinks that the Communists may be able to do it sooner than the Conservatives. In Russia the Communists are masters of the people; in Germany the industrialists. What Chelford says is that humanity cannot be trusted. It's an idiotic and a vain mob. It is only powerful when it is controlled and directed by superior intelligence. He wants to be the Tyrant of England. He doesn't care whether it is as a Conservative or as a Communist. He says the Communists hate democracy, and only pretend to be infuriated by the wrongs of the working classes."

Isabel said, "I hope you will not allow yourself to be influenced by such a person. Your place is clearly marked out for you. England is not a country that will ever submit to a faddist. I like you to be gracious and considerate to everyone; but I rather dislike the idea that you are associating on terms of equality with inferior people, and particularly inferior people who have unruly minds and disorderly dispositions. You must keep cranks at arm's length."

It was with a quickness which surprised Isabel that the spirit of George responded to the beauty of the country. As soon as the last villas were left behind, and all the draggletail vulgarities of the Great Wen were forgotten, and as soon as green hedges shone with sunlight on either side of them, and fields full of buttercups, daisies, and red sorrel lay to right and to left of them, with woods in the distance, animals feeding everywhere, and larks singing in the sky overhead—as soon as this change in their journey occurred George sat more upright in the car, took his mother's hand, and looked about him with bright eyes and exclamations of pleasure.

"Whatever people may say of our cities," he cried, with

delight and with pride, "England is still by far the most beautiful country in the world. I am so happy, mother, that I feel I must smoke!" He pressed her hand before withdrawing his own, and as he took out his cigarette-case he said to her, "It's very jolly to have you and England all to myself."

For some time they expressed their delight at the things about them, and, when they were in that affectionate and happy mood of companionship which makes a long journey between friends one of the most satisfying of life's pleasures, Isabel began, very tactfully, to question him about Maudie.

It was not long before her heart was singing with joy. Clear as the sun in the spring sky over their heads was the fact that George had no real feeling for this vulgar little girl of the dance-club. Elizabeth and Mary had not invented a lie; they had stumbled on a truth. Oh, and a great truth, a glorious truth! George had felt pity for Maudie, and his pity had led him to show her kindnesses which were unfortunate and unwise, but not disgraceful. She knew now, not only that there had been no degrading entanglement with this poor little common girl, but that she need never more entertain one fear for George in that dangerous region of human relations. He was pure. He was self-respecting. He was the very soul of honour.

She told him how greatly she was relieved by what he had said, and he replied that he had been moody ever since the accident occurred because he could not make up his mind to discuss the matter with her or with anyone else. "Somehow," he said, "it seemed a rather shabby thing to say that one was not interested in the girl, and that one had only taken her for a drive out of pity. You'll laugh when I tell you that, although the drive was the greatest bore I've ever known, my first thought when the two cars crashed together was, 'I shall have to marry her!' That was far worse, mother, than the spear-head of glass that nearly put my eye out of business."

Isabel laughed. She was very happy. "Marry her! My dear, what a queer thought! But trouble always comes of mixing up with people of that kind."

"Curiously," he said, "I had a 'warning' on the night when I promised to take her for a drive."

"A warning, dear?"

"Yes, a queer feeling that something ill would come of it."

"Ah," she cried; "I like to think, George, that your father's spirit is nearer to you than any of us suppose—nearer to you, and nearer to me too. I am sure he is looking after you. As long as I live I shall grieve that you never knew him."

George was silent.

"But tell me," said Isabel, "what form did this warning take?" She turned to look at him, this son who was now given back to her safe and sound, and loved him for his great beauty and his gentle ways.

"I'm afraid," he said, "it had nothing to do with my father."

"Tell me about it. George, I like you in that dark hat. It suits you very well."

"I had met, a day or two before I dined with Claughton that night—you know when I mean, the night in which we went to the dance-club—I had met a girl who made me think it was rather a poor thing to do nothing serious in the world and to get pleasure out of second-rate things. She was a very superior sort of girl; the sort of girl one finds in a Russian novel, but not often in an English house."

Isabel felt her heart growing noticeably cold.

"I don't know," continued George, "that I ever thought much about girls before. I just used them as dancing partners. I know I was always bored by the girls I met at dinner parties. I can't talk their jargon, and I don't like the things that they appear to like. But this particular girl—as a matter of fact it's Chelford's sister——"

"George!"

He smiled. "Oh, she's quite different from him."

"But still!"

Now Isabel understood why George had asked Chelford, that dreadful young man, to come to see him. Evidently he had wanted, not to discuss cranky politics, but to get news of the attractive sister. Was there ever such a misfortune? He seemed fashioned to go from one entanglement to another. How long would it be before a charming boy—so gentle and, alas! so weak—would be snatched up by some unscrupulous woman, his whole career ruined and his happiness utterly destroyed?

"I rather wanted you," George said, "to meet her before we started on this journey; but it doesn't really matter. You will meet her later on, and I'm sure you'll like her. Don't be alarmed, mother. I'm not thinking of marriage. Miss Chelford is a pretty girl, a very pretty girl, but her attraction for me is not of that kind at all."

"I should hope not!"

"But I do feel, all the same," said George, "that she could help me."

"In what way?"

He laughed. "How to think, to begin with. Then, perhaps, how to act."

"She's clever, is she?"

"Well, I don't think it's altogether that."

"Then what is it?"

"It's very difficult to say."

"But why?"

"Everything that isn't on the surface," George replied, "seems difficult to say. Perhaps that is why so many people take refuge in mere chatter. Anyone can chatter, I suppose."

"But you tell me, George, that you feel this girl could help you to think. How could she do that? You don't mean to say that she could help you in that way better than Aylmer, who is a Fellow of All Souls, and——"

He smiled. "Dear old A. M. has not yet succeeded in arranging his own thoughts. Haven't you ever noticed that forlorn expression in his large and lustrous eyes? I'm sure it comes from mental confusion. All sceptics who are not militant atheists have that look of bewilderment in their mild gaze. I'm terribly afraid of contracting it myself."

"But you are not a sceptic?"

"Well, I'm not a particularly ardent disciple."

"Oh, George, don't distress me! You believe in God?"

"Do you, mother?"

"Of course I do. George, how can you ask such a question? My darling boy, you fill me with the greatest unhappiness."

"Claughton once said something that made me think. We were having a brawl with Mayhill. Mayhill said something that was meant to be impressive. I forget what it was, but it was to the effect that his father believed in God and so never talked about Him. Claughton answered that if a man really believed in God he wouldn't be able to talk of anything else. By Jove, that's a real thought, isn't it? Something of a staggerer. Fancy, if one really did believe in God! Talk about revolutions!"

Isabel was unprepared for such an astounding statement. She made no answer. Indeed, she became so instantly absorbed in her own thoughts that she almost forgot where she was and with whom she was travelling.

Did she believe in God? Certainly not to that extent. But were there degrees of believing in God? Of course there were different ways of expressing that belief. The monk and the nun expressed their belief differently from—from—well, Mr.

Lloyd George and Lilian Skipton, for example. Yes, there were different ways of living one's belief. But were there different degrees of belief in a supreme Being? And if so, how great was her belief—how great, or how little?

They were silent for a long time, and when they did speak again it was about something passed in the road.

XVIII

THEY arrived at Glantingham just before five o'clock. The way through the park was extremely beautiful in the evening light, rising and falling with an easy gentleness between a double avenue of elms, chestnuts, and oaks set handsomely back from the grass-bordered yellow road. Every now and then wide lateral avenues opened out from this chief approach to the house, and between their tall trees striding across the green pastures of the park Isabel and George caught glimpses of antlered deer, or of mares licking the necks of fawn-coloured foals, while jays flashed from one side to the other, and the sky above rang drowsily with the cawing of rooks.

At one point there was a complete break in the main avenue, and there they saw something of the full splendour of this famous park, with its incessant beech-woods closing it in from the outer world. It was a generous and romantic Arcady, whose amiable undulations everywhere seduced the eyes and tempted the feet to pilgrimages of discovery. Far as eye could see stretched that rich green grass of the Midlands which is the most restful and bountiful in the world, so that wherever the gaze turned, whether upward to a copse-topped hill on the distant skyline or downward to a neighbouring dingle filled with bluebells and windflowers, it was never fidgeted, never challenged, never excited, but always confidently wooded.

Nowhere in all this wide kingdom was there a sign of effort or a sound of labour. Everything was green, settled, and composed. Tillage and buildings were out of sight. The cattle had nothing to do but eat, and might have been there for centuries; the birds nothing to do but sing, and might have been singing from the dawn of creation. It seemed as if this exquisite world of peace and loveliness had existed for all time, and had never once had its serenity broken by any of the brawlings of history, or its beauty disfigured by any of the whims of fashion.

Isabel spoke rather sadly of this beauty, which she had first visited with Herbert.

"It is lovely," said George; "it is most lovely; but I miss the openness of Durridge, and the sense of the moors and the sea. I think I should suffocate if I had to live in Glantingham. At Durridge I feel I could——"

"What?" asked Isabel.

He laughed. "Don't be shocked. Write a book!"

"Have you ever written anything?" she asked, not quite certain whether to be alarmed or relieved.

"Only scraps," he answered.

"Do you feel that you want to write?"

"My trouble is, mother, that I don't in the least know what I want to do."

"Look!" she cried. "There is the house! Ah, how well I remember my first view of it from this point."

But as the car drew nearer to the house she thought to herself, "Yes, *that* is his danger. He does not know what he wants." She recalled to her mind the proverb which says that if the devil tempts the busy man, it is the idle man who tempts the devil. Her eyes rested on the house, but her heart was occupied with the problem of her son and his future. He must be roused from his youthful apathies. He must *want* to do something, and that "something" must be great and good.

It was a low and wide-stretching Elizabethan house, with a beautiful clock-towered gateway leading into an inner grass court paved at its borders. Above the clustering tall chimneys and the rugged lichened tiles white pigeons were fluttering in the golden light of the sun—a light which brought out with a sensible sweetness the almost pink-like quality of the old bricks. Here and there a clambering rose or a thick honeysuckle grew between the small leaded windows, stretching up from their roots among the gillyflowers, forget-me-nots, and crimson tulips in the borders surrounding the house. On one side of the arched gateway, with its black and gold clock and grey-timbered belfry, there was a ceanothus in full bloom; on the other side grew a syringa in blossom and a may-tree full of pink buds.

Loveableness and an undisturbed domestic tranquillity were the chief characteristics of this beautiful old house, not grandeur of any other kind. One came upon it, from the wide pastures and the splendid timber of the park, with no feeling of surprise, and with no exclamation of approval, but rather with a smile of self-gratification for having anticipated its

slumbering beauty and its gentle dignity. The house, one told oneself, was the natural welcome to be expected from such a kindly old park.

The road continued past the house, curving out of sight into a wood which shielded the stables from view, and through which the road continued to the distant farm. At this point the driver appeared to be uncertain of his way, and the footman beside him turned his head to Isabel for instructions. She indicated by a movement of her hand that the driver was to steer for the gateway. As the car turned to the right and approached this simple entrance, Lord and Lady Hawthorpe, accompanied by two Irish wolfhounds, appeared under its archway.

Lavinia waved her hand, and Hawthorpe, taking his handkerchief from his pocket, waved a welcome with it to the approaching travellers. Even at that distance it was possible to perceive a pathetic difference in these two welcomes, the one the welcome of a woman who could see her guests coming to her, the other the welcome of a blind man who could only hear the sound of their approach.

The two great hounds stood with pricked ears and raised heads by their master's side, watching the car with a tense excitement. One of them suddenly sprang forward, and with a few great bounds circled the car, leaping up to get a closer view of its occupants. The other whined restlessly, rubbed itself against Hawthorpe's leg, and glanced up to his sightless eyes for an explanation or a command.

"Poor darling Arthur!" exclaimed Isabel, watching Hawthorpe and his fluttering handkerchief. She was thinking of far-off days when those large and intelligent eyes of his had rested upon her young face with curiosity and admiration. What an unspeakable tragedy, the blindness of such splendid eyes!

"God has called upon dear Arthur Hawthorpe to bear dreadful sorrow," she said, in a tone of awe and reverence. "His eldest son, the joy of his eyes, killed, and his own eyes blinded for ever."

"I don't remember Dicky Hawthorpe very well," said George.

"He would have been another Arthur," replied Isabel, and sighed as she waved her hand over the side of the car.

Lavinia, Isabel thought, had grown much stouter since last they met. She still preserved that businesslike trimness of appearance which was so characteristic of the thoroughbred hunting-woman twenty years ago; indeed, this capable,

efficient, and well-groomed look was still her greatest attraction and her main impression ; but she was now certainly too massive a person to be taken for Diana, and not beautiful enough, Isabel thought, to play the part of Juno.

Isabel told herself that Lavinia was growing old ; but growing old without the disquiet and dissatisfaction which were preying on her own peace of mind. Yet she was growing old, and to grow old is the most personal of all tragedies.

The door of Glantingham, framed by a reeded arch, is up three stone stairs under the gateway and on its right-hand side. Up these three stairs, and down a narrow corridor hung with water-colours, Hawthorpe conducted Isabel, his hand through her arm, while George followed with Lavinia. They turned first to the left, following the inner court, and then to the right into a somewhat wider hall.

On the wall hung a portrait by Sargent of a young man in hunting-kit.

Hawthorpe paused before it, and said to Isabel, " It's very like him, isn't it ? "

" Yes, Arthur dear ; it's very, very like him."

" Well," said Hawthorpe in a hard voice, and going forward again, " he died for England. *Dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos.*"

George glanced up at the portrait. There was the sweetness and smoothness of youth in the face, but in the brow and in the eyes an expression of conscious power and fearless self-reliance.

" You don't remember him very well, I suppose ? " asked Lavinia.

" Not very well."

" He was a very dear boy. He rode beautifully. I wish you had known him ; but, of course, he was older than you."

She walked on, and led the way into the drawing-room—a long and low-ceiled room with a line of fine windows. These fine windows, deeply recessed, looked over a beautiful garden to yew hedges, a wrought-iron gateway, and the tops of distant trees.

Tea was set out on two tables beside the fireplace. Lavinia went to these tables, bidding George look out of the windows at the triumph of her gardening.

" But is it necessary to look out of the window ? " he asked, and bent over a vase full of lilac. " Ah, how good that is ! " he exclaimed, and noticed that a photograph of Dicky Hawthorpe stood on this table.

Lavinia thought to herself, " I hope he isn't a sybarite ;

but he rather looks like one." She considered that he was very handsome, and feared that he might talk in epigrams. "What a thousand pities," she thought, "that he has not taken after Annabel."

There was something in this green and gold room which soothed George and rested his mind. It was in some inexpressible fashion a room of calm and abiding happiness. How strongly it smelled of lilies of the valley! He did not look at the beautiful carpet under his feet, at the famous pictures on the walls, at the rare and splendid furniture which enriched it, or at the china and glass which decorated its architectural dignity with a note of gaiety. It was rather the spirit of the room which entered into him, and cooled his mind with a beauty he welcomed like a caress. He felt that it was a room in which people lived orderly and graceful days, in which the jarring note of vulgarity had never been heard, and in which the tortured or troubled mind had never propounded one of the very least of life's problems.

He stood between the hangings of a recessed window looking out on the garden, with its calm lawns, its masses of spring flowers, its yew hedges, its old gate, its bronze fountain, its slow-stepping peacocks. One of the wolfhounds had followed him, and was nestling against his hip, asking to be fondled. He put down his hand and stroked it, but continued to look out at the garden.

This was no setting, he told himself, for a play by Euripides or a novel by Dostoevsky. What a discordant note would be struck if Chelford suddenly appeared round one of those yew hedges and came walking along a grass path between the borders of flowers with his curved pipe in his mouth. Rose Chelford would not disturb the beauty or the peace of the garden, although the cat in her arms might scare the thrushes and blackbirds. How they were singing! What a beautiful thing is the note of a thrush! There must be any number of nests in this garden. After all, a garden is one of the supreme joys of life. It is also man's natural setting. One could believe in God without much effort if one lived in a garden, and cared for flowers and listened to birds. And yet for how long? Would not the heart weary of such sweetness, and the mind rebel against such uneventfulness?

Those dreadful slums through which they had driven before they reached the country! What a contrast! But how real they were! Chelford was not out of place in those angry deserts of humanity. There lay the real setting of

modern life—a dusty, littered, filthy, and terrible arena, but still a place of strife. Dostoevsky could make his voice heard from any of those grimy, dark streets. Guy de Maupassant could find an excuse for the vilest of his stories in the suburbs and slums of London. There the heart of man was at grips with the universe. Here it was falling asleep in a false peace. Strife! Wasn't that the grand essential? A man like Lloyd George, or even Ramsay MacDonald, must find something in life which was denied to him. They were to be envied; they spent their days in the midst of a battle. How the sound of a sudden trumpet would scare this old garden!

Which was the great world—Arcady or Babylon? He compared the cool good looks of Lavinia with the fierce faces of Hoxton. He compared, too, the disordered eventfulness of London with the almost prim monotony of Glantingham. Was it better to drink tea in this restful and gracious room, talking of things that never really touched life, or to go into the warrens of Hoxton and try to mend the breakages of civilisation? A red flag—he could understand its glamour. Did he want to live in the one world or the other? All he knew was this, that he hungered for a real world. His problem was to decide which of the two worlds was the real world, and therefore the only great world. When he had decided that matter he would have to decide in what cause he would draw his sword. But at this thought he smiled. "A sword! Nature, I am afraid, has provided me only with a delicate rapier. I might be able to knight a cheesemonger, but hardly to slay a dragon."

His mother's voice recalled him from his muse. "Ah, here is Jenny!" she cried, and got up from her chair. The wolfhound left George's side, and padded quickly across the room. George turned round and moved towards the others.

He was surprised, at his first glance, to see how Jenny had grown. When last he met her she was a silent and demure little girl between fifteen and sixteen years of age. She was now nearly eighteen, and so changed in every particular that she did not seem to be the same Jenny. To begin with, she was entirely self-possessed, with a calm gravity in her level eyes, and a quiet aloofness of manner which made her appear far older than her years. He noticed at once the moulding of her round face and the rich fullness of her white neck. She was almost a woman. She was also beautiful. Her skin glowed, her queer, gold-speckled eyes were full of light, her lips shone with health, and her hair, which was a

conflict between red and brown, had a fire which was like an enmeshed halo. George became aware of this beauty when they stood face to face, and he took her hand, and they looked into each other's eyes. At the same moment, however, he was conscious in her of sadness and coldness, of a restraint which was not mannered, but the natural expression of a passionless heart. All her fire was outside her.

She could scarcely be said to give him a smile of welcome. He thought that she looked at him with curiosity, or rather with appraisement, and at once he became aware of distress, as if something in his life was unable to meet that clear and detached glance of her young eyes. He thought to himself, "She has heard about Maudie, and thinks I am a mere rotter." He wondered if she had discussed the matter with Annabel. He had been anxious for some time to know what view Annabel would take of that disagreeable escapade; but now he was acutely distressed by the feeling that this lovely girl probably thought of him with a certain measure of contempt, and dismissed him from her mind as merely one of the stupid young men who think it amusing to get into trouble with inferior girls.

He noticed at tea that Jenny had no eyes except for her father, and that it was she, and not Lady Hawthorpe, who looked after his needs. Something about her fascinated him more than anything else; it was the softness of her voice, which had the tone of tragedy in his ears.

When tea was over they all went into the garden, and there they were joined by the younger children. George observed that Jenny never left her father's side, and with her hand in his guided him very lovingly about the place, sometimes picking flowers for him to smell, and listening to all he had to say as if her life were absorbed in his.

The two wolfhounds followed the young girl and the blind father with a deliberate slowness which suggested that they regarded themselves as symbolised figures of sorrow and destiny.

XIX

AFTER dinner they assembled in the music-room, and Hawthorpe told Isabel that, if she was not too spoiled by opera and foreign singers for the genuine article, he would introduce her to some old English music which not to know was almost a crime, and certainly a folly.

"I hear that many of our war memorials are the work of foreigners," he said, "men who have more acquaintance with Montmartre than with Elizabethan literature. That's rather tragic, isn't it? How on earth can they know what the love of England means? But I'm told that so long as our statues and memorials are grotesque or hideous they are sure of high praise from art critics and humble acceptance by the nation."

As he was speaking, footmen, maidservants, stablemen, and kennelmen trooped into the room. Jenny went to the piano; her mother took a violoncello from its case; two footmen, who carried violins in their hands, brought music-stands from the wall and arranged them round the piano. One of the stablemen had a flute, and the rest carried books of music.

Hawthorpe stood in front of this assembling group, talking to them in his cheery fashion, calling each man and each girl by their Christian names, chaffing them about one thing and another, and telling them all that her Grace expected something to-night that would beat the Albert Hall, Covent Garden, and the Three Choirs' Festival into a cocked hat.

"We'll begin," he said, "with something cheerful, so as not to frighten his Grace into the billiard-room. Let's have a folk-song—'The Holly and the Ivy.' Where's my stick? Ah, thanks. Who gave it to me?"

"I did, my lord; Tom Durnford."

"Good fellow, Tom! Let their Graces hear your *basso profundo* at its topmost best. Now then! 'The Holly and the Ivy.' Are you all ready?"

He tapped the desk in front of him with his baton, and with a decisive down beat brought the little orchestra into action. The beautiful old English music came quietly, sweetly, and cheerfully to life, and began at once to play familiarly with the echoes of the room and the hearts of its hearers.

Then the voices broke into joyful sound, and the room rang with the jolly and vigorous words of a song that was sung in England before even Glantingham was built.

Isabel listened to the music and to the words, but her eyes hardly ever left the expressive movements of Hawthorpe's sensitive hands. It seemed to her that she was seeing some aspect of his soul which had hitherto altogether escaped her.

At the end of it, Hawthorpe turned about and faced his guests, bowing his thanks for their congratulations.

‘Old William Byrd,’ he said, “made a rhyme which every Englishman should have by heart. Listen :

Since singing is so good a thing,
I wish all men would learn to sing.

Write that up over your mantelpiece at DurrIDGE, George. By the way, I didn’t hear your voice in the folk-song. Let me hear it this time. We are going to sing Purcell’s ‘In these delightful pleasant groves.’”

George listened to the music, for he delighted in it, but his mind was with his eyes, which hardly ever looked away from Jenny’s face.

He thought that in profile she was even colder and severer, and, as her profile was presented to him nearly all the evening, he went to his bed wondering what could darken the life of a girl so beautiful and so fortunate.

He woke early, and tried to lie peacefully in bed till his tea came. But when the tea did come he was dressed, and soon afterwards he was walking through the gardens to the park.

It was a morning which ought to have recalled to his mind some words and music he had heard overnight—Morley’s “Now is the month of maying”—for the sweetness of the air and the freshness of the dawn, with all the birds of Glantingham singing their loudest, were like a bridal hymn. The smell of lilac, gillyflowers, and flowering chestnuts was blown across the garden by winds that were both warm with sunlight and cold with dew. The scent of damp grass and wet earth followed the young duke wherever he went, and when he had passed from the gardens to the park a little clump of may-trees greeted him with a breath that was almost suffocating in its sweetness. But of all these things he was only subconsciously aware, for his active thoughts were busied with a girl’s face and with the sound of her voice. Yet the loveliness of the world about him, after the dusty tiredness of London, ministered to this unrest of his mind, and made it a pleasure to tease himself with thoughts of Jenny, and also encouraged him to think without despair of her strange aloofness.

His mind was still full of Jenny when a quick sound of horses made him turn about. Fifty yards away he saw her galloping towards him side by side with her father, the wolfhounds following behind. He stopped, and waited for them to come up with him.

“Your Grace wakes early!” said Hawthorpe. “Is that a good sign, or a bad one?”

"It was too lovely to lie in bed," he answered, patting one of the hounds.

"But too early to muse. You should muse by moonlight, and ride with dawn. How did you sleep?"

Jenny looked less cold, and not at all severe, but her manner was still so markedly aloof that George felt more than ever sure she either carried a secret sorrow in her mind or entertained an unreasonable dislike for him. He looked at her the whole time he was speaking to her father, and sometimes Jenny would glance down at him, but with a look so detached and indifferent that it wounded his pride. It seemed to him that she resented his gaze, and that she evidently thought he should look at her father when he was speaking to him. He addressed a word to her, and her eyebrows went up a little as she answered briefly and coldly, in that low sweet voice of hers which still haunted him. How beautiful she looked! The freshness of the dawn and the vigour of her exercise had given the most charming glow to the bloom of her skin.

"We will meet at breakfast," cried Hawthorpe. "Now, my darling, one swift canter up to Crow's Copse, and then back again and down again. Are you ready?"

"Yes, daddy dear."

"I used to take her out with a leading-rein not so many years ago," Hawthorpe said to George, "and now she takes me. *Tempora mutantur!* But it's rare fun. Lead away, my Jenny."

George stood and watched them go. Jenny rode beautifully, and he decided that when he got back to DurrIDGE he would ride with Annabel. Jenny's poise added a new zest to his admiration. She was not one of those little creatures who naturally sit well on a horse's back. Without being either tall or fat she was of a certain dignified substance; and to watch her sitting so easily and so squarely on her side-saddle, every movement of her beautiful body harmonising with the passionate action of the great horse she was riding, gave George the feeling that her mind must have both power and rhythm—a strength and a responsiveness which gave dignity to character. "She is one of those girls who do everything well," he reflected, "but so naturally that one is apt to overlook their excellences. I wonder if she dances well. I bet she does—beautifully. By Jupiter, how I should love to dance with her!"

Then he fell to thinking. "I was sighing yesterday for strife. Perhaps I have found it. I wanted a world to conquer.

Perhaps that world is Jenny Hawthorpe. But can I conquer such disdain, such aversion? Why should she dislike me? God knows, I'm not a positive pariah. What have I done that offends her? I should like to ask her. I will ask her. I'll have it out with her to-day. After all, I've known her ever since she was so high." And then some of the words he had heard overnight came back to his mind, and he walked back to the gardens singing them,

The spring, clad all in gladness,
Doth laugh at winter's sadness.

There were also, he remembered, some words about each lad choosing his lass to dance upon "the greeny grass." Once more—by Jupiter, how he would love to dance with Jenny!

He waited on her at breakfast, and throughout the meal endeavoured to establish the familiar relations which are right and charming with old friends. She was pleasant and friendly enough, but there was no warmth in her pleasantness and no gladness in her friendliness. She talked chiefly of Annabel, and made him feel that she considered Annabel the finest girl in the world.

"Will you take me for a walk?" he asked her.

"Haven't you had enough of walking already?"

"No. But, if not a walk, then a drive. I don't remember this country very well. In any case, I should like to see it again."

"I'll ask my mother to take you."

"But won't you come too?"

"I shall be busy this morning."

"How unkind!"

"I help my father with his letters."

"Oh, I see." He waited a moment. Then he said, "Will you be busy in the afternoon?"

Before she could answer Hawthorpe interrupted them.

"The Baverstocks are coming to-night, aren't they, Jenny?"

"Yes."

"Remind me to ask him about St. Dunstan's." Then to Isabel he said, "We've got a dinner-party in your honour to-night. Todgers can do it when it chooses, I assure you. You must wear your diamonds. What a pity that George has not yet earned the Garter. By the way, George, I've got something to say to you. Come and smoke a pipe with me."

XX

GEORGE had a curiously unhappy feeling as he followed Hawthorpe, Jenny, and the two wolfhounds down the corridor towards the library. He had never felt less at ease in his life. It was as if some secret crime of his was to be brought up against him. The wolfhounds had now the appearance of policemen. He feared Hawthorpe, and hated the hounds.

When they reached the library, Hawthorpe told Jenny to take his letters to another room, to read them there, and to come back to him in an hour's time.

"Before you go," he said, fumbling among the books and papers on a writing-table, "I want you to give me that old *Navy List*. I can't find it at present. But it's here somewhere."

George stood by the fireplace, watching very unhappily the movements of this blind friend of his dead father.

He was aware in him of a power that was masterful and demanding. Blindness had robbed those fine eyes of vitality, but the face, more than ever reminiscent of portraits of the Duke of Wellington, was well-nigh overpowering, with its sense of vigorous and commanding mental strength. It was a hard face, almost a cruel face, but the hardness spoke of an inexorableness concerned with noble things. Suffering had blotted out from that scarred and maimed countenance every vestige of social pleasantness; courage under his sufferings had endowed it, flesh and bone, with a dignity that rebuked all light thinking and all selfishness of behaviour. It was a face that made George think of a battered rock emerging from a fierce sea.

George did not look at Jenny. He watched Hawthorpe. He was aware of Jenny, but it was the strong and upright body, the hard face and stubborn hair, the closed eyes and the firm lips, of this blind Master of Fox Hounds which held his gaze their prisoner. He rose, as Jenny moved from the table, to open the door for her, and then he did half glance at her; but before he had taken more than two steps Hawthorpe's voice called him back.

"Here, George, I want you to look at this. We'll light our pipes afterwards. It's a sacred thing. It's a part of England's history."

George took from his hands a shabby little cloth-bound volume, some seven inches in length and perhaps three inches in breadth. As he did so the door closed on beautiful and

youthful Jenny, and he was alone with the stark lord of Glantingham.

He opened the little book, and read on the title-page :

July 1, 1781.

A
LIST
OF THE
FLAG-OFFICERS
OF HIS
MAJESTY'S FLEET.

His eye caught several names :

Rt. Hon. Edward Lord Hawke, Knight of the Bath	} A Fleet
Sir Thomas Frankland, Bart. His Grace the Duke of Bolton Sir George Brydges Rodney, Bart., and Knight of the Bath	} A White

"Turn to page nine," said Hawthorpe.

On that slender page, which was headed "*Captains*," the first name to catch his eye was that of William Swiney, with the date after it, "2 May 1779," and because a Stretton had married a Swiney he thought that for this reason Hawthorpe had bade him turn to that particular page in the old *Navy List*.

"It's about twelve names from the bottom," said Hawthorpe.

But before George had begun to count, the great and glorious name flashed before his eyes: "Horatio Nelson 11 June, 1779."

That name did not mean so much to George as it had meant to most Englishmen born before 1914, but in the presence of Hawthorpe it did mean something more than all other names in the list, and he looked at it with a certain motion of romance in his heart.

"How interesting!" he exclaimed. He made a calculation. "Twenty-six years before Trafalgar! Do you know, I never thought of Nelson as a captain!"

He carried the book back to Hawthorpe's table, and put it down there. As he did so, he noticed that there was a photograph of the dead son on the table, and it was like a stab at his heart to think that the father kept that photograph on his own personal table, although he could never see it.

Hawthorne said, "There are other illustrious names in that old list, including the noble name of Collingwood, but, of course, the great name of Nelson outshines them all. Now, George, a question. What was it that distinguished Nelson above all other men? It wasn't courage. It wasn't even genius. Other men there had genius; all of them had courage. No; it was a passion of patriotism such as no King or Queen has ever known—not even Elizabeth. That's why we all love Nelson. Because he loved England. And once upon a time Nelson was a little sick, pale, nervous boy, with a heart as tender as a girl's and a brain as easily rattled as a foal's. Now, put the book on the table, get out your pipe, and let's have a real talk, man to man."

For some time Hawthorne spoke of men wasting their lives for want of a passion. He said it was a pitiful thing to think of Englishmen going to dance-clubs in London, as flies go to beer-and-treacle, or as drugged wasters go to morphia and cocaine, when the whole Empire was in need of men who love the open air and are worthy to call themselves pioneers.

He said it was a tragic thing that men of their class, on whose education and upbringing many thousands of pounds had been spent, should use their manhood much as strumpets use their womanhood. He said it was the bounden duty of every educated Englishman to give back to the nation in service the advantages he had derived from birth, wealth, and leisure. It was the bounden duty of aristocracy, not merely to set an example in manners and morals, but to give the nation a lead in its highest activities; in fact, to go before it to the consummation of its Imperial destinies.

Then he brought the matter home to George. What was George going to do with his life? He was a duke, and one of the wealthiest of dukes. He had been to Eton and Oxford. He owned vast estates. How did he intend to live? Was the fox-trot more to him than the Empire? Was he going to hang about bored ladies in drawing-rooms and painted girls in night-clubs; or was he going to take his rightful place among the servants of his country? Let him think well. To live the life of London society meant weariness of mind, feebleness of soul, and a heart without fire or peace. But to set out on the path that Nelson had followed, and to love glory like a mistress, meant a life so full of creative activity and good solid fighting that even obstacles and defeat had no power over the soul, either to diminish its lustre or to sap its strength.

Few could have listened to this blind man without being

moved. George was certainly moved—deeply moved ; but he was also distressed by the feeling that he was helpless to cope with a mind like Hawthorne's. He glanced out of the leaded window to a garden full of sunlight, flowers, butterflies, and birds, and felt, as he had so often felt when worried by his governess, a desire to break away and escape.

The library was a low, long room of peace and gentleness ; it was not so dignified as the library at DurrIDGE ; it was a room that still kept the Elizabethan atmosphere of playfulness—that pretty and pleasant atmosphere in which men toyed with culture and guessed how they chose at truth, before the ruthless dogmas of science had made scholarship a hard labour and a stern duty. But, in spite of its homeliness and geniality, George was so overwhelmingly conscious of Hawthorne's personality that the room had no charm for him, and he felt only that he was back at school, and with his lesson unlearned.

He replied to Hawthorne's final question—looking at one of the wolf-hounds which was lying in front of him with its head on its paws but its eyes open and its ears pricked—that unhappily he did not yet feel himself fitted for any particular service. He certainly had no taste for the army. As for politics, he was interested, but somewhat confused by the clash of parties. He had no wish to live the life of a *flâneur*, but he was not conscious of any talents that would justify him in hoping that he could be useful either to his country or to the Empire.

"But you do not care for DurrIDGE ? "

"Oh, but I do."

"Not as your father did. Not as Annabel does."

"I grow fonder of it every day."

"And London ? "

"It amuses me for a little ; but it is not by any means a powerful attraction."

"Aren't you conscious of any tendencies in your mind ? "

"I love reading. I love study. Yes, I should say my vocation is that of a student."

"Very well ; a viceroy who is cultivated is better than a viceroy who is half-educated. You did well at Eton, and quite well at Oxford. They tell me that you are good-looking. I can feel that your manners are excellent. I believe your character is sound, and it will get sounder if you put it to work. All those gifts and qualities can be used for England. We want men of character and parts to represent us in India,

in Canada, in Australasia, and in Africa. We want to get rid of the board school sap who is ruining the British raj in India, and making a stupid mess of things in Egypt. We have got to smash the present civil service system, and man the Empire as we officer the fleet. It will come. And I pray God it may come before the mischief has gone too far."

He counselled George to keep up his reading, to be attentive in the House of Lords, and to direct his patronage to every great activity that had the Empire for its end. "When you travel," he said, "let it be to the Empire. Get to know it. Look at it with your own eyes. See its glory for yourself. Fill your soul with the vision of its boundless prosperity. And then write about it, talk about it, and put yourself at the head of those who are trying to make it a reality to our stupefied masses. Then, George, you'll have a great life, and your children will be proud of you, and your country will remember you."

There was silence for a moment, then Hawthorpe said, "Are you looking at me, George?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let's have it out together. You're not quite happy, are you? I've got the feeling that you're bothered about things. Don't mind talking about it. We've all been through it. Dicky would have had the same trouble, I've no doubt, if he hadn't met Annabel. The thing is to come through it with the face in the right direction. You'll say, But what is the right direction? I think it can be described in one word, Seriousness. If a man feels that life is serious, and therefore that his business is with serious things, he'll ride straight, and he'll get up when he takes a toss."

It was extraordinary, George felt, how he was compelled to keep his eyes fixed upon the face of Hawthorpe, although there were no eyes in it to answer his look. He found it impossible to glance away. It seemed to him that the mind of Hawthorpe had eyes, and that those eyes were privily regarding him, as if to search out all the weakness of his soul. Occasionally he had the feeling as if a ghost was speaking to him from another world, or as if a wall had found a voice and was telling him its secret thoughts. Never before had he felt that his soul was more nakedly bare.

Someone at Oxford had once said that man is a composition of electrons and protons, and that thought is nothing more than a chemical movement down the tracks in the brain. Looking at Hawthorpe, George found it impossible to think

that he was being addressed by a chemical automaton, and not by a living soul. The more he looked at Hawthorne the more sharply was he conscious of the soul as an absolute truth of Reality.

He made up his mind to be open and above board. He spoke about Chelford, and gradually told Hawthorne that Chelford was a deicide who believed only in science, and held that democracy should be used as a battering-ram by an aristocracy of educated men. He spoke of Chelford's influence over his mind, and of his difficulty in making up that mind what to believe and how to live.

"I think I can safely say, sir, that I am not much tempted in the way that a good many fellows appear to be; but I do feel that my life is rather undecided; and I confess to you that I don't think I shall care for anything very much until I know rather more about life."

Hawthorne replied: "I am interested in your friend. I should like to meet him. Do bring him here some day. But let me give you a warning. Never let yourself be influenced by eccentric people. They don't last. They are succeeded by other eccentric people whose eccentricities are often the very antipodes of those who went before. Amuse yourself by studying such people, but don't let them dominate you in any way."

George recalled Rose Chelford's warning. Yes, it was a sign of weakness to be so freely influenced by other people.

But Hawthorne was speaking again. He proceeded to sketch out for George the reasonable faith of an educated man.

It is difficult to believe that unintelligent forces of nature developed Mind. But it is not so difficult to believe that Mind brought those natural forces into existence. Therefore it is easier to believe in God than not to believe in God. Begin with Mind, not with Matter.

Then, the most striking quality of evolution is direction. It moves intelligently. Whatever else wanes and ebbs, knowledge increases. Man is growing in knowledge. His mastery over nature increases. But to grow in knowledge without growing in goodness is obviously dangerous. Mastery over nature without mastery over oneself leads to destruction. Therefore the moral order is essential to evolution. Evolution, in fact, is governed by a moral principle.

As for Chelford's sneer about the vanity of morals, man discovers higher truths in morals just as he discovers higher truths in physical science. Because education is backward

in the Cannibal Islands it does not follow that education in Germany is absurd. Because the morals of the Chinese are rooted in a primitive tradition it does not follow that the morals of the educated English gentleman are irrational. No, we grow in goodness, just as we grow in knowledge.

As to Chelford's view of nature, there is far more give and take, far more co-operation, far more independence and helpfulness, than bloody strife. The preying creature tends to die out. There are more lambs in Wales than tigers in India. There are more sparrows in London than hawks in Cumberland. Nature is not so red in tooth and claw as Tennyson painted her. Men lost their heads in the first shock of Darwinism. The most striking thing in nature is the love of the parent for its offspring. Every tree and every flower is toiling to produce seed. Every hedgerow and every rabbit-hole is full of mother-love. Even the stoat and the fox cannot escape from the self-sacrifice demanded by this love.

Finally, as to an aristocratic tyranny in England, it ought to be unthinkable. Trades unionism, gradually growing into Socialism, had made tyranny possible in a democratised and urbanised and commercialised England; but that was a danger to be fought against. Indeed, the great task for the Conservative of our time was to restore the ruins of English liberties, and to give to democracy a sense of individual responsibility and personal greatness. Every Englishman should feel that freedom is his right. Bureaucracy needed to be watched. It had filched away too many of our liberties during the war.

If George wanted to emerge from indecision, let him get into the thick of the fight as soon as possible. No man was safe who hadn't got a job. The bigger the job the better for the man. Looking on was for little fellows. Nothing like a fight to bring up the muscles. The greatest fight in the world is the fight for the grandeur of life and the moral responsibility of the individual. Every man is entitled to greatness.

"I beg you, at any rate, my dear George," said Hawthorpe, "not to slip into London habits. Live in the open air. Get to know country people. Never have any truck with men and women who blur the line between right and wrong. Feel what a splendid thing duty is, and feel, too, what a wholesome and noble thing goodness is. Don't live a petty life. Live a big life. You're at the threshold of a career that is either

going to help England or hinder her. You can't live—no one in England can live—without helping or hindering her. Choose the right road. Don't dally and don't prevaricate. Take your courage in both hands, and say, 'I am for England, body, soul, and spirit.' You'll be all the happier when that choice is made."

He straightened himself up, and recited in the old pronunciation of his day:

*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori :
Mors et fugacem persequitor virum,
Nec parsit imbellis juventae
Poplitibus timidoque tergo.*

As he finished, the door opened very quietly and Jenny entered the room, as if she feared to disturb them. She carried in her hand a basket full of letters.

"And now, George," said Hawthorne, "you must go into the park and think over what I have said. I hope you don't feel that I have been too presumptuous. I loved your father, and I adore Annabel. For their sakes I have ventured to speak to you with a freedom, perhaps with a brutality, which would be impertinent if it were not inspired by real affection."

"I only wish," George replied, "that such bracing words could have been heard by one more fitted by nature to act upon them."

He was conscious as he said these words of a movement of Jenny's head which seemed to him irritable and contemptuous. In an instant his mood was changed. He felt indignant with Hawthorne and angry with Jenny. But he made an effort, and floundered on unhappily. "You have helped me in one respect a good deal. I shall be better able to handle Bob Chelford in future."

Jenny walked to one of the windows impatiently, and looked out at the garden.

Hawthorne spoke. "That's good, George. But, mark you, it's your own life I want you to handle, and to handle strongly."

"Oh, please don't think that I intend to let Chelford handle it for me."

"Think of Nelson," said Hawthorne. "Walk about Glantingham and think of that great man. Glantingham is a bit of the England he loved. I thank God I once had eyes to see it. By the way, don't be afraid to feel, George. That's what's wrong with so many young people in this age. They're

afraid to feel. Even the statesmen in charge of England's destiny appear to think it bad form to take themselves too seriously. Seriousness is fast becoming a vulgarity. 'It's worse than wicked; it's vulgar.' I wish some of our statesmen were as vulgar as Nelson and Pitt. Enthusiasm isn't folly, except in a crazy mind. Don't you be afraid to love England. And don't you be afraid to tell her that you love her. I'll give you three words to think about—Nelson, Duty, and Love."

XXI

DIRECTLY he was outside the door of the library, a hot and shameful feeling that he had been "talked to" took possession of George. Hawthorne himself, however, had nothing to do with this sensation of anger. It had its rise entirely in Jenny's attitude of contempt.

He walked swiftly through the deserted corridors of the silent house till he came to a door that opened into one of the gardens. Here he paused to light a cigarette, and then opened the door with petulant force and walked out into the open air. He intended to go through the gardens to the park, but half-way down one of the grass paths of a garden he came upon his mother. She was seated on a bench in a recess of a yew hedge, with a sunshade shielding her face, and with no hat on her head.

"I have been admiring Lavinia's cleverness," she said, making room for him to join her on the seat, shifting her sunshade to the other shoulder. "How well she has grouped those verbascums and anchusas. But she is a very clever woman in numerous ways. Glantingham is wonderfully run, and without any disturbing sense of efficiency. She took over the stables and the kennels when poor Arthur went to France, and she has managed them ever since. We must pay them a visit this afternoon. I am so glad you have come to sit with me, George. It's a very beautiful world, this world of Glantingham, isn't it?"

She spoke disjointedly, because George had disturbed her in a reverie, but he took her rather nervous greeting to be a confession of guilt in the matter which was burning a hole of smouldering edges in his usual good sense.

"It seems to me, mother," he said quietly but firmly, "that I have been brought here with a purpose. Apparently I am regarded as a dangerous character, and Lord Hawthorne

has been put up to read me a lecture. I very much resent it. I have not told him so, and I do not intend to make a scene while I am here ; but I very greatly resent the manner in which I have been received and the spirit in which he has just spoken to me."

Isabel, astonished by this onslaught, assured him that he had been brought to Glantingham with no such purpose, and asked him with convincing consternation what Lord Hawthorpe had said to put such an idea into his head.

"He seemed to suggest," answered George, "that I spend my life in London night-clubs. He talked to me in a very highfalutin manner about Nelson, and pretty rudely told me that I was not a good Englishman, and that the sooner I began ranting about the British Empire the better it would be for me, my wife, and my children. I didn't ask him whom he had chosen for me to marry, but——"

"Somebody must have told him about the dancing-girl," interrupted Isabel. "I wonder who it was."

"I expect Annabel has exaggerated the whole dismal affair in her letters to this little prig of a Jenny."

"No. Annabel would not do that. I know who it is."

"In any case, Lord Hawthorpe had no business to speak to me as he did. I am not a monster. I have done nothing I am ashamed of. Even if I had, he has no right whatever to take me to task. I am extremely annoyed."

"I know who it was, George. You may depend upon it, Lady Mayhill has given the Hawthorpes an entirely false version of that unfortunate affair. They live not far away, and they are coming to dinner to-night—she and her son ; he it was who, more than anyone else, put the story about London."

"It makes my blood boil," said George, throwing away his cigarette, "to think how people discuss my private affairs, and how so many people feel themselves charged by Providence to direct my career. I intend to live as I choose. I will take advice from no one. I do hope, if Lord Hawthorpe speaks to you about my future, you will let him know that I hate politics, that I am not interested in the Empire, and that I shall amuse myself in whatever ways seem proper to me."

A robin swooped down from a shrub, landed on the flower-bed opposite the bench on which they were seated, shook down his wings, bobbed his tail, cocked his eyes upon them very shrewdly, uttered a faint chirrup, and then with two

or three quick hops brought himself to the centre of the grass path.

Beyond the opposite yew hedge there was a sound of a hoe at work on the earth, and farther away still the sound of a mowing machine. Everywhere else the buzzing air rang with the spring music of birds, and glittered with the brightness of the sun.

Isabel, who was now as wholly oblivious as George to all the beauty and peace of their surroundings, said to her ruffled son, "You are naturally indignant, George; but do try to think that only a real interest in your career could induce a man like Arthur Hawthorne to speak to you with such wounding earnestness. You must remember that Elizabeth and Mary have got our family talked about in a very unpleasant way. Lavinia did not exactly question me about them last night, but I could see perfectly well that she was anxious to get news of them. It would certainly be a great disaster if you were to develop tastes like theirs, and if you refused to consider that your rank has many public responsibilities. I do beg you——"

"I'll bet anything," George interrupted, with great spirit, "that Annabel has made out to Jenny that Elizabeth and Mary are as red as wickedness can paint them, and that I am no better than any silly young fool who hangs round stage doors. The way this girl treats me is insufferable. And she is supposed to be Annabel's friend. I shall tell Annabel very frankly what I think of her when we get to Durrig. I'll bet anything she has libelled the lot of us."

The robin gave him a look and hopped away. A moment after it was singing with great spirit from the top of a green painted flower-stake.

That night at dinner George's feelings were still further outraged, but in another, and even a more painful, manner. It was a dinner-party of country neighbours—a friendly and cheerful party of refined people with similar tastes and a common tradition. The men looked like men of the open air, and the women like lovers of gardens, children, and the art which is not artistic. There was an absence of all showiness in the assemblage of these guests in Lavinia's drawing-room, but not an absence of brilliance. Many of the women were markedly handsome, and wore beautiful clothes, and had distinguished manners. Isabel considered that the scene was more characteristic of England, and more truly an expression of the real great world, than most of the dinner-parties in

London, where affectation, the *ennui* of ill-health, and the fashionable cosmopolitanism of the day make a function of this kind, not a festivity, but a ceremony.

Among the guests came young Mayhill, pale, grinning, and embittered, forcing himself on Isabel's attention, and even bringing people up to her to be introduced, uttering little jests, and speaking of "George" with an extreme of familiarity. To George's great annoyance, this dislikeable young man took Jenny in to dinner, and monopolised her afterwards in the drawing-room. To make matters worse, he caught hold of George's arm and swung him round to face Jenny and himself.

"You ought to take us into the music-room," he said, "and give us an exhibition of the latest American fox-trot, or the last word in night-club bunny-hugs. Don't you think, Jenny, that George is a very beautiful specimen of our post-war *jeunesse dorée*? You know, of course, that he is at the head of the Brighter London movement. Oh, yes; he's the Savonarola of that great movement. Aren't you, dear George? A burning enthusiast for more cocktails and louder jazz orchestras. I believe his straw-coloured hair is the talk of the night-clubs. By the way, George, how is the poor little girl whose throat you so nearly cut by your bad driving?"

George looked him very firmly in the eyes and said, "Has no one ever told you that your form of wit is fatiguing?"

"Only those whose vanity it has pierced."

"I find it as tedious as American humour. It exaggerates so dreadfully."

"Dear George, you are extremely decorative, but the gods, I assure you, slipped no irony under your strawberry leaves."

Jenny got up and moved away to speak to a passing guest—an elderly man with an armless sleeve pinned across his coat. At once Mayhill became George's most affectionate friend, took him by the arm, invited him to sit down, wooed him with twinkling eyes and smiling lips. But George drew his arm away, looked Mayhill in the eyes, and said to him: "I do not like you; and I will thank you not to address me in a manner that is too familiar for your knowledge of me." And with this, leaving Mayhill like an angry cat, he walked to the other side of the room. All the rest of that evening he avoided Mayhill's eyes, but over and over again, in looking at Jenny, he knew that Mayhill was at her side.

It was with his heart in a perfect storm of rage that he went to his room. That night, turning restlessly and fiercely in his

bed, he heard the old black and gold clock in the gateway tower strike three before he dropped off to sleep. When he woke it was with all his wrongs flaming in his mind.

They walked across the park to service in Glantingham Church. George was able to get a few minutes' conversation with Jenny, and he made immediate use of this opportunity to say how very much annoyed he had been by Mayhill's persiflage.

"He may be an attractive person to women," he said, with a fine scoff, "but men thoroughly dislike him. His mind is pretentious and arrogant. He seems to feel that it is his *métier* in life to disparage people greater or cleverer than himself. He is always sneering, giggling, and browbeating. He should make a successful attorney. I like Lord Beaconsfield's sneer at lawyers—that the first principle of their practice appears to be that they may say anything they like, provided they are paid for it. I very nearly told Mr. Mayhill last night that he seems to be making great progress in his profession—a profession in which, as Lord Beaconsfield said, the privilege of circulating falsehoods with impunity is delicately described as doing your duty to your client."

"He seems to have upset you."

Her low voice, in spite of its sweet music, had a rebuke in it. George was stung to even greater rage.

"I very much resent," said he, "the impression about me which he seems to be so industriously circulating, not only here, but in London."

"What impression is that?"

"The one which you certainly believe to be true," replied George.

"Isn't it true?" she asked, with an indifference which made his breath, already troubled, come hot and fast.

"If you think I am a young fool, dance-mad and frivolous, you are entirely mistaken. Mr. Mayhill is not a friend of mine. He knows nothing about me. He happened to be at Oxford when I went up, that is all; and it is a very great presumption on his part to call me by my Christian name. I told him so last night. He knows nothing whatever about me. I shall be obliged if you will kindly tell your father that he has formed an altogether false idea of my habits and tastes from the gossip—the probably malicious gossip—of Mr. Mayhill. I should not like to leave your father with that false impression in his mind, since he too might help—unintentionally, of course—to spread this libel on my character."

"Why don't you yourself speak to him about the matter?"

"All right. I will. Yes, certainly I will."

"But don't give him the impression that you are an egoist."

"I don't understand. Do you think I am an egoist?"

"You seem to think that a number of people are greatly interested in you."

"A man surely has the right to defend his character when it is traduced."

"Of course."

"I don't think, however, that I am by nature an egoist."

They walked on in silence for some time.

"I hope," he asked, "that I have not given you that impression?"

She looked at him. "To be quite frank, you have."

"You seem to like thinking ill of me."

"No, I assure you."

"However, it doesn't matter."

"No, it doesn't matter."

"You are not sufficiently interested in me to care whether I should be hurt or not by such an opinion of me in your mind."

Again she looked at him; and this time with a hard challenge in her eyes. "Why should I be interested in you?" she demanded.

This was too much for him. He answered weakly, with a poor affectation of indifference, "I thought perhaps that as Annabel's brother you might possibly care to know whether the reports circulated about me are true or not."

"No, I assure you."

The bells were ringing a peal as they came out from the park. Beside the village green, just opposite the church, several motor-cars were drawn up at the roadside.

"People come quite a distance to our service," said Jenny. "We get cars from Stratford and Leamington and even Coventry."

"Really."

"But no stranger is allowed a seat until the villagers are settled down. My father insisted on that."

The visitors who had come by car were grouped round the porch, listening through the open doorway to the organ. They drew aside when they saw the blind Lord Hawthorpe approaching. Many of the men among them raised their hats.

"We get our organ going, Isabel," said Hawthorpe, coming to a pause at the porch, "from half-past ten, when the

door is first opened. There's no gloomy silence. He's a genius, our organist. You'll meet him at luncheon. An enthusiast for Bach. He comes to luncheon, and the parson, and the schoolmaster—very good fellows, all of them. We believe greatly in music. We're a singing village."

The church was crowded. When the Glantingham party had entered their pew, chairs were brought into the side aisles and the transepts for the visitors outside. All the time the organ was filling the church with glad and triumphant music. When the bells ceased ringing, the organist brought his voluntary to an end, but at the same moment struck the first bars of the hymn, "Now thank we all our God." Then from the porch came the sound of singing, and a procession of choir-boys advanced up the middle aisle, followed by male choristers and the rector. When they had reached the chancel, more chairs were brought into the centre aisle, and occupied by still more visitors.

Isabel felt her heart revive at this manifestation of church loyalty, and decided that she would very thoroughly observe the procedure, so that it might be introduced at DurrIDGE.

The secret soon made itself clear. It was a service of music. But it was a service of glad music. Every hymn was of a triumphant character. Never once was there a wail or a dirge. The choir were perfectly trained, and all the villagers themselves seemed to be singing, and singing well. The absence of gloom and lamentation from this service had its effect even upon George, whose aching heart was thrilled more than once by the triumph of the music and the gladness of the voices all about him.

It seemed to Isabel that the brief prayers, beautifully intoned by the young rector, were his personal way of occupying the times of rest between chant and hymn, and that the whole service was one of real worship, real praise, and real thanksgiving. She hoped that the people confessed their sins at home, by their bedsides, for she felt that there was a certain danger in this too joyful attitude towards the awful mysteries of eternity.

She looked at the young rector with interest when he entered the pulpit. He was a man just over thirty, brown as a field-labourer, with a refined and gentle face, and eyes that were bright with mental activity. Isabel was satisfied by his look of good breeding, but was not altogether sure that he was a man to be trusted. She would listen to every word he said.

His first announcement startled her. "The cricket match this afternoon," he said, "will begin at 2.30, not at 2.0. It is a match between Glantingham and Shoborough." His next announcement concerned the arrival of a party that week from St. Dunstan's. "The Glantingham band," he said, "will meet the train."

He gave out his text—"Be of good cheer," and for ten minutes talked intimately to his people as a fellow-man. What he said was destined to change the whole tenor of Isabel's life.

He told the villagers that the greatest discovery of science since Darwin was the discovery of the power of suggestion in the human mind. It would probably take fifty years for the greatness of this discovery to become general knowledge. Then there would be a complete change of men's minds to all the circumstances of human life. It would affect architecture, and even wallpapers. A whitewashed wall with one cheerful picture was a power for happiness; a wall unrestful with tortured gilding and unnatural designs was a power for depression.

He explained to them that a person's mind was always receiving impressions of one kind or another, just as the eye was always receiving vibrations of light, and that these impressions had an effect upon thought and character, whether we were aware of them or not. Hence the great importance of flowers and gardens, of cheerful cottages and kindly faces, and hence, too, the great importance of the Christian religion—the only religion in the world which encouraged people to adopt a cheerful and victorious attitude towards life. Christ had said "Be of good cheer." He had also said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." People in cities, even people of great wealth and at least some education, were running hither and thither in search of excitement or any form of distraction for their dreary minds. They could not be happy in their homes. They could not be satisfied with their great possessions. They were for ever seeking happiness in things outside themselves, and usually in wrong things. Was there anything more condemnatory of an artificial civilisation than the pathetic cry for a Brighter London? More electric lights! More drink! More dancing! More freedom to turn sweet night into noisy day! These people were deliberately surrounding themselves with wrong suggestions. The things in which they sought happiness were for ever raining into their minds

suggestions of unrest. They were only making things worse for themselves. They got far less out of their pleasures than country people got out of their labour in the fields. No ; there is no rest, there is no peace, there is no thanksgiving, for any man or woman in this world who does not know that the secret of life is love, and who does not realise that only those things about us which suggest love can feed the soul with the true nourishment of God.

To poor George this simple discourse was a fresh agony. He felt that Hawthorne must have spoken to the rector about him, and he felt that Jenny, who was sitting at his side, was delighting in the knowledge that he was once more affronted. He picked up his hymn-book during the sermon, leaned forward in his seat, and rather ostentatiously turned its pages. But although Jenny noticed this action of his, and rightly interpreted it, Isabel saw no more of it than Hawthorne did, so absorbed was she in the preacher's face and in the preacher's words.

If suggestion had this irresistible and pervasive influence on the human mind, how awful, in God's sight, must be the sin of London ! And how could George, living in that city of evil suggestion, escape the contagion of the world's slow stain !

It was with an entirely new vision of civilisation, of life, of herself, and of God, that she walked back across the park, listening to, but hardly hearing, Lavinia's practical good sense.

"You have made a wonderful place of Glantingham," she said to Hawthorne as they approached the house.

"George could do the same with Durrighe," he replied.

"I hope he will."

"If every landowner did his duty in England," said Hawthorne, "there would be less unrest in the towns and more stability in our politics. I'll tell you what the secret is, Isabel. It's the conviction that life has a meaning. Life's a blessing, but a blessing that carries serious responsibilities."

XXII

At luncheon the conversation turned upon suggestion, and the young rector told one or two impressive stories of the use made of suggestion by medical men. He ventured to think that many of the miracles in Christian history were examples of this power. "Our Lord was in the habit," he

said, "of telling those whom He cured not to speak about the matter, as if He feared the counter-suggestion of their sceptical friends, who would probably say that He was a charlatan. Most important, too, is the statement that He was unable to work miracles in places where unbelief was too strong for the reception of a new idea. 'Believest thou I can do this thing?' He was powerless unless there was positive faith in the patient."

Hawthorne saw all this from the point of view of Empire. He said that masses of British people were sceptical about the Empire because nothing in their surroundings suggested it. They lived in sordid circumstances, with their minds monopolised by sordid things. Labour politics, characteristically enough, were opposed to Imperial idealism. The people in towns damaged their minds by never exercising them in the field of imagination. The only interest they took in anything outside their dark homes was an interest in betting. Their newspapers told them everything about crime and nothing about Empire. They drank chiefly to dull the ache of their cheated minds. But one day they would wake up to the wonder of the Empire; economics would force them to that new birth of the English soul; and then there would be a renaissance of the Elizabethan spirit.

The schoolmaster, a cheerful little tub of a man with gold-rimmed spectacles, said that he hoped the day would come when the State would organise Empire excursions for the school-children of England.

"By the way," said Hawthorne, turning his face to George, "that is something I should like your Grace to think about. You've got a lot of unemployed miners at DurrIDGE. Annabel has been worried about them for some time. Why not make up a party for South Africa? Take them out yourself—wives, children, and all—and see them set up in business before you turn again home. Build a city there. Why not? But first of all I think you ought to make a tour of the Empire. As soon as your coming-of-age festivities are over, I should like to see you start off for Canada. You'd see something of the harvest. From Winnipeg to the Okanagan Valley you'd be travelling through such a pageant of the fruits of the earth as you'd never forget for the rest of your life. People talk of the great world as if it meant a few fine houses in London, and a collection of people who talk in epigrams, go to the opera in diamonds, and wear dresses at Ascot and Goodwood for which they never intend to pay.

How ridiculous that is ! The only great world worth talking about is the British Empire."

The rector asked, "You are too preoccupied with the Empire, sir, to bother your head about the peace of Europe?"

"Yes."

"You'd ignore Europe?"

"I'd leave that question to settle itself in a natural way."

"What way is that, sir?"

"Population. Germany's sixty millions will be eighty millions in your lifetime. France's thirty millions will probably be twenty or twenty-five millions. You can't stop a river in spate from overflowing a neighbour's meadow."

The schoolmaster's eyes flashed behind their gold-rimmed spectacles. "But, my lord, you don't want to see Germany in occupation of the Channel ports?"

"I have a great respect for German intelligence and German patriotism," said Hawthorpe. "Intelligence deserves to reap its reward; patriotism is national self-respect, without which no people deserves to live. And if we are intelligent and patriotic the British Empire will develop into one great solid unit of power, and then there will be no reason why our children should fear Germany, even when she dominates the whole Continent."

Lavinia turned her face to the rector. "I loathe every German," she said, with intense feeling.

"The German," said Hawthorpe, "comes fourth in the list of God's chosen people. First, the Englishman; second, the Scotsman; third, the Scandanavian; fourth, the German."

The rector asked if he might give his list. "I got it," he said, "from a great shipowner. First, the Briton; second, the Chinaman; and third, the German."

"What about America?" asked the organist.

Jenny smiled. "Skyscrapers and jazz!" she said gently.

"America," Hawthorpe replied, "will realise in fifty years' time that she is a senior partner in the British Commonwealth, and then she will become great and glorious. For the present she is a provincial; enormously rich, but still a provincial. She has no sense of a world destiny."

After luncheon they walked to the cricket field and watched the match between Glantingham and Shoborough. The rector was captain of the club. The organist conducted the Glantingham band, which played music during the afternoon. At the side of the pavilion, under the shade of oak-trees, long

tables were set out for tea. All round the field were villagers—men, women, and children—sitting on the grass, most of them with dogs. Hawthorpe's party occupied deck-chairs near the pavilion, from which a flag was flying.

Isabel, watching the rector placing his field as two Shoborough batsmen came from the pavilion, wondered what became of the Glantingham Sunday school; but when she saw the rector bowling, his run, his action, and his follow-up after the ball reminded her so keenly of Herbert that she fell to thinking of old days, and forgot to worry about the condition of the children's souls.

George noticed that Jenny was on the most natural good terms with the villagers, and watched her with a sore heart as she went from one group of women to another, or sat herself down on the grass in a company of children.

Hawthorpe, with his wolfhounds lying at his feet, sat next to Lavinia, and Lavinia described to him the events of the match. She told him who was bowling, where this man and that man was fielding, who missed a catch, who made a quick and accurate return, and on which side of the wicket the various strokes were made. Neighbours occasionally came up to pay their respects to him, but even when he appeared to be engrossed in their conversation he would ask Lavinia, at a burst of clapping, or at a sudden exclamation of the crowd, what had happened.

George's anger against Hawthorpe had evaporated. He watched the blind man with wonder, compassion, and admiration. His young heart was very sick, but there was enough altruism left in his mind to enable him to realise that Hawthorpe was a brave and splendid person. He found himself wishing that he had some of those great qualities which made Hawthorpe so commanding a spirit. Why had he never been able to take a real interest in his college boat, or a real interest in the University race, or in the match between Eton and Harrow? Why was it that he had always had to pretend that he was interested in the athletics of his school, his college, and his University? What was it in his character that prevented him from feeling any interest in the local patriotisms of his contemporaries? Hawthorpe was apparently as keen to see Glantingham beat Shoborough as he was to see the British Empire a solid economic unit. To George, both of these events seemed equally unimportant. He felt that other things were eminently more important. What things? He stopped to think. The things that

interested Bob Chelford. The clash between rich and poor, the struggle between truth and error, the mental fight which went on in spite of the fall of empires—the soul and her problems.

He began to think of Rose Chelford. How would she view this life of Glantingham? Wouldn't she feel that excitement over a village cricket match was ridiculous? Wouldn't she have seen something contemptible in the rector's sermon—his self-satisfaction with cottage gardens and smiling village faces, while the slums and warrens of Hoxton teemed with disfigured and degraded humanity? What would she say, he wondered, to Lord Hawthorpe's obsession about the British Empire? She would tell him that India, and Canada, and Australia, meant nothing to millions of half-starved and wholly uneducated London people, forced by cruel economic conditions to live in a worse plight than his cows and pigs, his horses and dogs.

What would she think, he wondered, of Jenny? She would have to say, of course, that Jenny was the most beautiful creature in the world; that was obvious and inevitable; but wouldn't she say that Jenny's life was only a little more intelligent than the lives of the village girls with whom she was now talking? Wouldn't she call that life of hers selfish, dull, unimaginative? Could she herself ever live happily in a suffocating green park, doing the same sort of thing year in, year out? And wouldn't she say that Jenny was arrogant, self-satisfied, cruel, patronising, and as blind as her father to the real business of life?

He said to himself with sudden vehemence, "I know how I can forget Jenny. I know how I can forget her insolent eyes and her damned coldness. As soon as possible I'll go back to London. I'll take a room in Hoxton. I'll live like the people there. I'll be a Socialist. I'll see Rose every day. We'll be friends. We'll make the Red Flag a power in the land. I love Rose. She understands me. She is not only beautiful, she is an idealist as well. This present order of things is rotten. It has got to go. We'll sweep away the profiteer, the slum-landlord, the greedy banker, and all the humbugging Lady Bountifuls still left in the villages."

He got up from his chair. "I am going for a walk," he said to his mother.

Hawthorpe heard him. "What, aren't you interested in cricket, George?"

"Not very much."

"Poor fellow!"

George walked away, with the uncomfortable feeling that the Hawthorpes and his mother were speaking about him. The music of the band made it difficult for him to walk naturally. He felt that he was making a fool of himself. One of the dogs of the villagers broke away from its master, and flew towards George, barking at his heels. Jenny looked up and saw him. He put his cane under his arm, took his cigarette-case from his pocket, and stopped at a little distance from Jenny to strike a match. Then, without a glance in her direction, he walked on, swinging his cane.

Yes, he had found his destiny at last. He would join the Labour party. He would become an out-and-out Socialist. Now, at last, he had found something to think about. He walked for hours in the park; but at the end of it he was not half so convinced of his Socialism as he was of his love for Jenny.

XXIII

FOR some days after his arrival at DurrIDGE, George postponed the indignant cross-examination of Annabel, which he had rehearsed in his mind—with brilliant success—ever since Lord Hawthorpe's talk in the library at Glantingham.

For one thing, he had not realised the difficulty of confronting so impressive a personality, or of cross-examining so composed and competent an intellect. There was something about Annabel which did not invite attack. Not only was she by nature a person of singular composure, but her mind had acquired during the past seven years something of the greatness and the dignity of her work—the management, in extremely difficult circumstances, of a vast estate.

She made a strange contrast to Elizabeth and Mary, who had arrived by train from London a few days before Isabel and George made the journey from Glantingham by car. While they were thin and willowy, she was full-bodied and straight as an ash. While they were pale and powdered, she was not only brown in face and neck, but brown in hands and wrists. And while they looked sickly and almost consumptive, she looked as naturally healthy as a young gypsy.

There were many other differences between the sisters. Elizabeth and Mary had feeble voices, talked with a drawl, and used strange words. Annabel's voice, on the other hand, was strong and controlled, her speech direct, her words few and traditional. And while the sisters, for all their airs, were

sprawling and ungraceful, Annabel's every movement was full of ease and dignity.

Isabel noticed this contrast less than George did, for she kept her room in a manner quite unusual with her for several days after her arrival. She appeared to have developed a singular zeal for writing letters, and to one of her correspondents—a Mrs. Cottner in London—she seemed to write a letter, and a very long letter, every day.

Soon after her arrival she had sent a note to the rector asking him to come to see her. The rector of Durrige, Mr. Chimpney, was a middle-aged man with three passions—golf, bridge, and fly-fishing. He was fat, red-faced, untidy, and lethargic. On the other hand, he was the least inquisitive of neighbours, and the best good-natured man in the world. He had always prided himself—and with justice—on the neatness with which he could divert conversation by a jest or an apt quotation from anything in the nature of seriousness.

Isabel's letter was brought to him in his study, where he was smoking an after-breakfast pipe and cleaning his golf irons with an oily rag. Her summons annoyed him, for it meant the postponement of a match with a young Anglo-Indian colonel who had fought in Palestine without contracting any noticeable enthusiasm for the Prince of Peace, and whose irascible temper made him an easy victim for the parson's straight work with wood, his infallible putting, and his irritating good-nature through the green. Moreover, Mr. Chimpney was never quite at his ease when Isabel was in residence at the castle. He felt that her watchful eye was upon him, and that she was far too evangelically minded for the peace of a small parish.

When he arrived at the castle he found it was for no other purpose than to hear what Isabel had to say about the church services at Glantingham. He heard her out with a tolerant smile which annoyed her, his dirty hands folded over his considerable stomach, his double chin resting on a waistcoat which was splashed with many disagreeable stains. Then he dismissed the whole idea in a few good-natured and humorous words. The people of the North, he said, are incorrigibly "Low." They regard church music, except that of a dismal order, with grave suspicion. A bright service stood in their eyes for a step towards Rome. Moreover, they hated to be fussed about religion. To introduce any such changes as Isabel had suggested would very seriously upset the parochial apple-cart. Besides, in his opinion, clerical

fireworks never lasted. Odd parsons came and went. The parson who kept religion going in England was the parson no one ever heard about.

Isabel said to him, "Is it not rather that you do not care to take the bother of making these changes?"

He was well aware that she had not appreciated his point of view, but he was unprepared for so direct an attack upon the sacred citadel of his private life—that was to say, his inward and spiritual opinions.

"You are quite wrong, duchess."

"I have lately heard a saying," she continued, "which greatly impressed me. It is that a man who really believed in God would not be able to talk about anything else."

"Dear me, what a nuisance he would make himself to all his neighbours!"

"You do not agree?"

"Duchess, that saying of yours is the definition of a fanatic. They say that an expert is one who knows nothing else. Now we can present another saying to the world. A fanatic is one who can talk of nothing else."

"But our Lord talked of nothing else."

"We only hear that He talked of nothing else."

"And His apostles, too?"

"Well, that was seed-time. When a new idea is being planted in the world's mind the sowers have to be busy."

"But don't you agree that really to believe in God is to find the mind occupied by nothing else? What can be more important than such a faith? Isn't it because we are so dull and apathetic that we don't realise the marvel and the majesty of immortality?"

Mr. Chimpney pursed his lips and depressed his stomach with his folded hands. He had never allowed his thoughts to dwell on the exact nature of a halo or the precise form of a golden harp. The other world, it might almost be said, did not interest him. He liked it *in nubibus*. If it did turn out that there really was another world, well, he would do his best to greet the late Mrs. Chimpney with a show of affection, and to behave himself with a becoming dematerialised propriety. But he was far too grateful to his Creator for the very pleasant delights of this present world—for example, marmalade and tobacco, golf-courses and trout-streams, arm-chairs and bridge-tables, jolly men and domesticated women—to speculate on matters which were evidently wrapt in mystery for a good purpose.

He let his stomach come cheerfully forward again, and, with as serious an air as he could command, said to the contemptuous evangelical duchess, "There's an old Latin saying, '*Laborare est orare*,' which means——"

"Oh, I know what it means."

"I'm sorry, duchess. I make my humble apologies to your scholarship. But don't you agree that to work is to pray?"

"And that is precisely what I want you to do."

"To do what?"

"To work for the glory of God and the triumph of faith over apathy and indifference."

"I consider that I do."

"Then we differ at all points. But I realise that it is no use to speak to you on these matters." She rose, and held out her hand to him.

He got upon his feet awkwardly. "You seem to be displeased with me, duchess," he said, taking her hand, which was quickly withdrawn.

She had half turned away from him, but suddenly she brought her face round again, regarded him with stern and indignant eyes, and said, "I think you are one of many who are the worst enemies of religion in this country. You make it a mere aside of life. The last thing you desire is to see it taken seriously. It would interrupt your pleasure if people wanted to worship God. You not only belittle the demands of religion, but you avoid altogether the existence of infidelity and sin. You minister half-heartedly and perfunctorily to people who are supposed to believe, and you never once utter even a warning to those who are living as if God had no existence and immortality no meaning for their souls. That is how, Mr. Chimpney, I view your discharge of your very sacred duties. And that also is how I see the great body of the English Church. You must forgive me for saying that I do not think you are a convincing example of the apostolic succession. You have much to learn, believe me, however humiliating it may seem, from the devoted Jesuits of the Catholic Church."

So exasperated was the rector by this terrific onslaught on his rectorial position and his religious opinions that he did not realise as he drove through the park, whacking his fat pony with hot anger, that there was still time for his match with the Anglo-Indian colonel. But if he had realised this fact, he would probably have said, "In my present mood he would be sure to beat me—how that confounded woman has upset me!—and so I will let matters stand as they are."

XXIV

ON their return from a visit to the home farm, George paused on a bridge over the river just above the Force and addressed Annabel with the following words.

"There is another matter I want to discuss with you. I found at Glantingham that I was treated as a suspected character. Someone seems to have told the family that I am a weed. I do not object to criticism ; I do object, and very strongly, to false criticism. Can you tell me who it is that has libelled me to the Hawthorpes, and explain to me for what purpose my character has been misrepresented and distorted in this fashion ? "

Annabel, resting her back against the old stonework of the arched bridge, turned her face sideways over her shoulder, and looked her brother in the eyes. He was facing towards the river, and had been working the ferrule of his stick into the spaces between the stones, grinding it there by the pressure of his chest on the handle and the turning of the stick with his hands.

"You appear to think," she said, "that I have maligned you to Jenny. You are quite wrong. She has often asked me about you, and I have told her what I believe to be the truth. If you want to know what that is, I will tell you. I think you are more likely to be called a charming person in London than to be remembered up here as a good duke. I don't think I have told her anything else. When your accident happened I answered one of her letters by saying that I thought it was nothing more than a boyish escapade, and that I did not think it in the least characteristic of your general life."

"In short, you have a very low opinion of me ? "

"No. But not a very high one. I wish I had."

"You feel yourself quite capable of passing judgment on me ? "

"From my point of view, yes."

"What is that point of view ? "

"Well, I have had two ambitions for you. One is as old as you are ; the other dates from about 1918. I wanted you to be as good a duke as my father. That was my first ambition. The other was that you should marry Jenny."

George started.

"And I have the feeling that you are in love with Jenny," she continued, "and that while you were at Glantingham you made a mess of your prospects in that direction."

"I suppose she has written to you ? " He lowered the

stick and leant over the bridge, looking at the water as it flowed to the sea.

"Yes, she has written."

"Can you tell me what she said?"

Annabel considered. "No," she answered at length; "I don't think I can. But I tell you what I can do. I can tell you what Jenny thinks about men in general."

George attempted a scoffing snort. "She appears to be in love with that disagreeable person young Mayhill."

"Jenny will never be in love with anyone who is disagreeable."

"You should have seen them together at Glantingham."

"I know Jenny as thoroughly as I remember my father."

"Well, what is her view about men in general?"

Annabel rested her back more stiffly against the bridge, and with her feet firmly planted, her hands holding a stick across her legs, answered George in these words:

"Jenny lost her favourite brother in the war. Her father, to whom she is devoted, came back from the war blind. She thinks that any man who can use his life merely for his own pleasure or amusement, after so great a tragedy as the war, is beneath a decent person's notice. She has no use for them. She says that she can't understand them. The racket in London immediately after the armistice made her sick. She says she has much more sympathy with the Socialists, who are at any rate trying to make England a better country, than with the numskulls and flappers in London who have no other idea than playing the fool. In other words, Jenny is a serious and intelligent person. There is nothing in her character to suggest the chorus girl. She is only a child at present, but she will grow into a splendid woman. I've watched her all my life. I know her very well indeed. Although she is much younger than I am, she is the only person I know to whom I can speak intimately. Some people think she is cold and arrogant. She isn't in the least. She doesn't gush, of course. She has the proper self-respect and the natural restraint of an educated person. But she is quite affectionate and kind. It is only because she remembers what the war cost the world in suffering and loss, and only because she doesn't treat life as if it were a society crush or a miner's beanfeast, that some people think her cold. She isn't cold a bit. The man who wins her love will win something very well worth having."

George was overwhelmed by a single thought which suddenly presented itself to his imagination. One day he might

be able to touch Jenny. A moment ago she had seemed to be utterly beyond his reach; now it was conceivable that he might actually touch all that lovely young beauty—touch it with his hands, pay tribute to it with his lips.

He turned away from the river, taking his sister's arm, and led her from the bridge and the noise of the falling water. For some time he walked without saying a word, his eyes bent on the ground, his face very serious, his steps lagging and uncertain. Presently, under a group of ilexes, he stopped, and said to her, "He will have to be a rather wonderful person, won't he?"

"I don't think so."

"But of course he will."

"On the contrary, I can't imagine Jenny falling in love with anything eccentric, and geniuses are always more or less eccentric—at least, so I have been given to understand."

"Well, that's perfectly true," said George, more hopefully.

"I should say that the man she will fall in love with will be a man who does his duty quite simply, but with real thoroughness; a man, of course, who is clean and straight, and who doesn't countenance anything shady or crooked."

"Annabel," he said, pressing her arm with his fingers, "I happen to be very much in love with Jenny, and if you'd help me I promise to make a better show of the matter than I did when you first put me on a pony's back."

"My dear George, if you'll leave yourself in my hands I'll make it quite easy for you to marry Jenny. All you've got to do is to realise that Durridge is sacred ground, and to love it as father loved it. Durridge could make a man of anyone."

"But I shall also have to cultivate a lively interest in the British Empire."

"Not more than every decent man does who realises that it's necessary to the existence of England."

"And you honestly think that Jenny might care for me? I made a frightfully bad impression on her, let me tell you."

"Jenny," said Annabel firmly, but without any trace of boasting in her words, "will do anything I tell her."

XXV

ONE afternoon, while they were having tea on the terrace from which Isabel had seen Herbert for the first time after her grand tour, Elizabeth said to her mother, "I have got a piece of good news to break to you. There's a boy in London named Trappett. I don't know whether you have met him.

He's in the sporting set. I don't suppose you have. But he's all right. And we're more or less engaged to be married."

Isabel stared at her.

"He's in the Brigade," said Elizabeth; "but he's of good, honest, plebeian stock. I think his father makes things."

"Let's hope," laughed Mary, "that it's something useful, like cocktails. As long as it isn't antique furniture it's bound to be respectable. The old boy's awfully rich, mummy. Isn't he a knight or a baronet, Bess, my love?"

"He's a baronet," said Bess; "and I'm proud to say he's a Lloyd George creation—not a drop of blood in his veins from the mistresses of Charles the Second or the pimps of Orange William."

"When's Tommy coming up?" asked Mary.

"One day next week, if mother doesn't object."

"Mummy object!" exclaimed Mary. "Why, she'll jump at it; won't you, mummy? A rich young man, heir to a baronetcy, in the Brigade, and highly respected at Tattersall's—it's more like a novel than real life. Besides, dear, she'll be getting rid of you, and that will be a very considerable easing of her responsibilities. I don't mind telling you, now it's all over, that we have felt a great fear ever since you were born that you were going to be the bad girl of the family."

"I told him that I'd wire if you didn't want him to come," Elizabeth explained to her mother.

"I shall not be here next week," said Isabel, and got up from the table.

"That's torn it!" whispered Mary to Elizabeth.

As Isabel walked away, she turned her head and told George that she would like to speak to him in half an hour's time, if he would come to her boudoir.

She entered the castle with a heart full of misery and despair. Her life, she felt, had been a failure. Perhaps this last insult from one of her children was sent to her as a fresh indication of the way she must take. In any case, her decision could not long be delayed. The distraction of her mind in these last few days had become intolerable. How little she had slept since she came to Durrige! How earnestly, nay, but how agonisingly, she had prayed! And how blest, how thrice-blest, had been the ray of heaven's light which had at last penetrated the darkness in which she walked!

On her progress through the castle to her boudoir Isabel passed numbers of beautiful things which had once given her deep pleasure, and knowledge of which, in the days of

the old duke, had been something of a passion with her. Strange how little they meant to her now! Strange how trivial to her seemed interest in such things! Toys, nothing but toys, all these transitory creations of man!

When George came into her room she was standing by the window looking out at the park—the same window at which she had stood with George in her arms twenty-one years ago.

She turned to him, approached him, took his hand, and led him to a sofa which faced towards the fireplace, with its lovely little Bosse mantelpiece. "Let us sit together for a few moments. I want to talk to you." She continued to hold his hand.

"I'm afraid Elizabeth's announcement was a shock to you," he said.

"I do not wish to discuss Elizabeth."

"Mr. Trappett, I believe, is a presentable person. It was stupid of Elizabeth to——"

"I am not interested in Mr. Trappett. I want to talk to you about Jenny."

He said, "Annabel has told you?"

"No, I guessed for myself; and I have been corresponding with Lavinia for some weeks."

"What does she say, mother?"

"Dear boy, what she says may be helpful to you in your whole life; not only in your love for Jenny, but in your whole after-career. She says that if you show signs of taking your responsibilities seriously, and cut yourself clean adrift from people who live aimless lives, she feels quite certain that Jenny would be interested to see you again and to give you her friendship. But Jenny has made up her mind never to leave her father till he has quite recovered from the effects of the war. You do not know that ever since he was blinded he has suffered indescribably at night. Lavinia had to give up her attempts to look after him. His dreams were too much even for her strong nerves. Jenny has taken her place. She is a wonderful and devoted child. She has her bed in the room next to his, and the door between the two rooms is always kept open. Night after night that poor child sits up with him. She wakes him from his frightful nightmares. They are the most dangerous form of dream that can visit the brain; and Jenny's task is not only to wake him directly she hears his cries, but to nurse him and talk to him, or read to him, when she has roused him. You can imagine what she suffers. He is fighting one of the most dreadful fights the

soul can fight ; and that brave and beautiful little Jenny is helping him. It is a fight, George, for his sanity."

"Mother, how awful!" He had paled, and now he shuddered. "How awful! Did Lady Hawthorpe tell you this while we were at Glantingham?"

"No ; nor has she told me by letter. It was from Annabel I heard about it. It is, of course, a great confidence. You must tell no one, and you must not by any hint or suggestion convey to Jenny your knowledge of it. I tell you about it because I want to ask you whether you are prepared to wait a long time for Jenny. That is a serious question for you. I debated the matter with Annabel, and she agreed that I should tell you about Jenny's position. She said it was only fair that you should know. But she said that it must be a complete confidence. You must never breathe a word about it."

George said, "It seems an awful thing—having to wait for something one wants very much."

"I know, dear."

"But, of course, it has got to be done. Poor Jenny!"

"You will wait for her?"

"There's nothing else to do, mother. I'm very much in love with her."

"Well, while you are waiting, what will you do?"

He smiled. "You know the story of Victor Hugo and his son when they went into exile?" he asked, taking her hand.

"I forget it, dear."

"The father said, 'What do you propose to do?' The son replied, 'I shall translate Shakespeare ; and you?' The father answered, 'I shall look at the sea.'"

"But you must do something quite different!" She pressed his hand.

His gaiety had returned to him. He smiled in the way that she loved, and said to her as he slipped his hand through her arm and nestled against her shoulder, "I shall cross the sea and think of Nelson. I shall visit the British Dominions and think of Sir Walter Raleigh, Robert Clive, Lord Lawrence, Dr. Livingstone, and Cecil Rhodes. Men used to go on pilgrimages for their loves in days gone by ; and this is going to be my pilgrimage. I shall not follow Lord Byron's bad example and make a pageant of my bleeding heart ; but I shall ask you and Jenny to think of me as a pilgrim of love as well as a pilgrim of Empire."

"Are you serious, dear, or are you jesting?"

"Won't you come, too, mother?"

"Oh, you are jesting."

"No, really. I should like you to come, and Annabel. But, of course, Annabel will never leave Durridge."

"She will have to leave it when Jenny comes."

"No; I've asked her always to live here as agent. I'm sure she is better than any man. The people like her very much."

Isabel started. She put her finger to her lips, thinking. "Wait a minute, George. There's a letter somewhere that you ought to read. If you are really serious about taking an interest in the Empire—and it would be a good thing for you to do—you must read a letter I received from Mr. Joseph Chamberlain when your dear father was killed. It has a reference to you. Now, where did I put that letter?"

"It seems a bad omen, mother. Mr. Chamberlain failed in his mission."

"Oh, no. His work is still going on, and one day it will triumph. You heard what Arthur Hawthorpe said about the future of the Empire?" She got up. "I remember now! It's in this bureau. I will give it to you. You must keep it. You must take it with you to South Africa."

George got up and walked about the room. It was a dreadful thought to him that Jenny's young life was chained to her father's sufferings. He thought of Milton and his daughters. He considered that Hawthorpe had no business to accept such a sacrifice. He went over his conversations with Jenny, and wondered what she must have thought of his egoism and his offended vanity, living such a wonderful life as she was living. Annabel, he knew, had been putting that matter right; but would Jenny ever forget his silly-young-ass behaviour? He knew that he himself would never forget it, and that he would be ashamed of it all the days of his life. If only he could see Jenny and explain!

Isabel opened a drawer in the bureau. The first letter to meet her eye was the last letter Herbert had written to her. She started, for she had not thought often about him in these last few weeks. She took it out of the drawer very reverently, opened it, and stood there, reading it.

As she read those simple words her heart was overcome with a great sense of failure and remorse. She realised, greatly as she loved George, that he was not the man of whom his father had dreamed. "A rough-and-tumble bringing up—nature's way. . . . I think we ought to encourage him to play games with the village children and to go about a lot with the keepers and quarrymen. . . . I hope he

promises to be a real good strapper. . . . Nothing finicky."

Had she made a mistake? She had sheltered him from the world. She had kept him from every danger that seemed to threaten his soul. And at the end of all her care he was—What was he? Who could say what he was, or what manner of man he would become? Did she feel that he was safe? Could she say that her heart was at peace for him?

"George," she said very quietly, "here is a letter from your father. Do not read it now. Take it and read it by yourself. And here is Mr. Chamberlain's letter. You may read that later too. Both of them, I think, will help you."

She crossed the room to the window, and stood looking out on the park, her back to George, who was standing in the centre of the room with the two letters in his hand.

"There is something else I have to say to you," she went on in the same quiet voice, and then turned round to him. "I heard from your Uncle Alfred the day before yesterday. He believed at the end of the war that England was going to capture the foreign trade of the world. He told me that we should quite easily pay our debts, and that the country would enjoy unexampled prosperity. He now tells me that the Government and Labour together have destroyed that hope. He uses the phrase, 'England has missed the tide.' He warns me that we are advancing to days of the greatest misery and disturbance. He says that for five years at least we shall be living on our capital, supported, not by the trade and industry of the nation, but by the bankers. He thinks there may be a revolution. He is perfectly certain that there is going to be widespread calamity. He uses the phrase, 'a smash that may finish us.' Now, George, I want you to prepare yourself for dark days. I want you to feel that the times demand of you great qualities of mind and soul. You are going to cultivate an enthusiasm for the Empire. That is what your father, I am quite sure, would have wished you to do. And I am glad you are going to do it. But you may find that even the Empire is not the true centre for all the loyalties of humanity. I mean, you may find that the unhappiness of life and all the dreadful clash of different opinions and different interests, even here in England, require a greater centre than devotion to the future of the Empire." She turned her head and looked out of the window. "I have made that discovery," she continued, "in the last few days. I do not want to influence you in the very least. You must

take your own road. But it is right that I should tell you what I have discovered."

She turned round and faced him. As she did so, by some curious trick of memory she recalled the favourite quotation of the old duke about Sir Robert Peel, "*There is a gentleman who never saw the end of a campaign.*" She too had never seen at the beginning of her life the need of a clear and definitive thesis. Hence the unrest and chaos of that life; hence the waste of her days and the failure of all her efforts; hence—Elizabeth and Mary. George, too! He at all costs must be made to see the need of looking far ahead. Oh, if she might take him where she herself was going!

"I have discovered," she said, "that the suggestion of the world is evil—persistently and pervasively evil. You remember the sermon we heard at Glantingham? I have discovered also, George, what I had long suspected, that the suggestion of the Protestant Church is conflict. Well, dear child, your mother is afraid of the one, and very, very tired of the other. I dread the evil which has corrupted your two sisters under my very eyes, and I can no longer bear the conflict which meets me at every turn in the English Church. I want peace to my soul, and I am going, George, where I believe true peace is to be found. I believe that the only general centre for the loyalties of all nations, and all men, is the Catholic Church. I am making my submission next week."

George started. It was not, however, with any shock of either surprise or indignation; it was rather with the thought, "How very interesting this is! What a picturesque thing to do! By Jove, won't Lady Skipton jump out of her skin when she hears about it."

Isabel continued: "I do not want you to think that I am now trying in any way to convert you to my view. But I do want you to look ahead—far, far ahead. Look far ahead in this matter of Jenny. Are you quite sure, absolutely sure, that you love her with all the force of your being, and are you sure that she will make you happy? Do look ahead, George; always look ahead. It is not only the first step in life that counts, but every step. Every thought we think is important. Every affection we cultivate is important. Everything, everything we do, is enormously important. It always has been so. It is going to be even more so in the terrible times that are coming. Do remember, each day of your life, that nearly everything in the great world is a suggestion of evil, and that without the common centre of love for God, and

absolute loyalty to His Church, there must always be conflict and turmoil—no peace, no harmony, no coherence. I can't tell you how often I have thought of Geoffrey Cloughton's words that really to believe in God is to think of nothing else. But it is to dear Mrs. Cottner that I owe my conversion, and when you next come to London I want you to meet her—not that she will talk to you about Rome, but because I want you to love her, and to feel with your mother that she is one of God's saints. Your life, I am sure, will be safer, and therefore happier, for her love, which she will give you freely."

She put out both her arms, and he advanced a step to receive her embrace.

"Do you understand me, George?"

"Yes, mother."

"You are not sorry that I am taking this step?"

"No, mother."

She kissed him, and said, "I can't tell you how happy I am."

Then she told him that she had been looking at her jewels and considering what to do with them. "I knew," she said, "that Annabel would not care for them. I realised that to divide them among Elizabeth and Mary might only add to those temptations of the world which are already too strong for their weak characters. Then I thought I would sell them, and give the money to the Little Sisters of St. Vincent and St. Paul. But it came to me yesterday that such things could be given to Jenny without doing her any harm, and that if I gave them to her she might understand that I am hoping one day to see her taking my place at Durrige. I hope, George, that such knowledge in her mind may be helpful for you. They are packed up, and to-morrow I am sending them to Glantingham. We shall see what she says. I am praying, darling boy, that God will order all these things for your happiness, now and through eternity."

George, charged to break the astounding news to the other children, went first to Annabel. She listened to his report with an expression of face which told him nothing. She was as imperturbable and composed as ever. At the end of it she only said, "I wonder if she would even have thought of such a thing if father had not been killed."

To Elizabeth and Mary the news came with a quite different effect. Mary laughed. Elizabeth whistled. Then they lighted cigarettes to stay their nerves, and Elizabeth said, "It is just what one might have expected from mother. She

doesn't like anyone to grow up. And, of course, she has never grown up herself. That has been her whole business in life—trying to prevent people growing up.”

“All the same,” said Mary, “we mustn't let it make any difference to our affection for her. Can't you imagine the old Pope chucking his tiara in the air when he hears the news?”

XXVI

ALONE in the library, George sat down in a chair by the great transomed window to read the two letters which his mother had given to him, and which he had held in his hand while he was speaking to his sisters.

As he entered the library, the thought that he owned this beautiful and gracious room came to him with a strange intensity of conviction. For the first time in his life he realised that he was head of the family. His mother had charged him, as head of the family, with this difficult mission to his sisters. She was going to London, and henceforth would live outside the intimate inner circle of the Stretton family. Suddenly he had become, so it seemed to him, the Duke of Rothbury, and lord of Durrige. At the same moment he seemed to see what Annabel had meant when she said, “Durrige could make a man of anyone.”

The first letter he opened was Mr. Chamberlain's. It flattered him to know that a great Minister of State had thought about him when he was a mere infant, and had spoken of the part he might live to play in the history of his country. He thought to himself, “Whether I go to Canada or Australia, I must really go to South Africa. I ought to visit the place where my father died. I should like to take Annabel there. We'll go together, after the celebrations, and we'll come back and tell Jenny about it.”

He opened his father's letter. At the first glance the boyish character of the handwriting rather troubled him. The crude sentences daunted the proudful feeling that had so lately possessed him. He noticed how repeatedly his father employed the word “lot.” The reference to Annabel in the postscript almost hurt his feelings. He thought to himself, “If my father had lived he would certainly have loved Annabel more than me.”

But the letter fascinated him because it was the letter of a man he had never seen, and yet the man who had begat him. Before he could either crawl or form a syllable, that father

had vanished out of human life. What manner of man was he? His mother made him out to be a prince of men; but that was probably the *aberglaube* which deifies religious teachers and creates miraculous legends. This letter was certainly not the letter of a notable person. But—Annabel loved the writer! That made him think. Annabel still worshipped her father's memory. He said to himself, "Personality!" and read the letter again.

There grew in his mind a new idea of his father.

He said to himself, "I see what he meant! My mother is going to do what he was anxious I should be saved from. She is going to run away from the world. He wanted me to live in the midst of my fellow-men. He saw the danger of sheltering human life from the winds of nature. He believed in hardship. He believed in rough contacts. He believed in struggle."

He reflected that Elizabeth was right. Their mother was afraid of freedom. She did not want the world to grow up. She was going back to one of its old nurseries. She would like to take all mankind along with her, shut and lock the door, and then throw the key out of the window. No more speculation; no more daring guesses at the mysteries of nature; no more advance.

But this was Chelford's attitude, too. He also would like to put humanity into a strait waistcoat. This fellow Lenin was only the Tsar in a new coat. Socialism had precisely the same goal as Rome. Freedom of the mind was hateful both to priest and Communist. The one said, "Let us set up the tyranny of spiritual authority." The other, "Let us set up the tyranny of economic authority." Distrust of humanity, that was common to both of them; it was from that point they set out, and, although they travelled on different roads, their goal was the same. No more individualism.

All the same, freedom was a dangerous thing. To use freedom as Elizabeth and Mary used it was bad. To use it as so many idle people used it in London was to degrade it. He thought of the mutinous poets, painters, and sculptors in Chelsea. To use freedom as they used it was a mental blasphemy. Self-conscious art—what a horrible little thing it was. A man must be careful how he used freedom. It could either belittle him or destroy him.

"Nothing finicky!"

Those two words of his dead father suddenly glowed before him, as it were in letters of fire. Yes, that had been his

mistake. He had become finicky. He was gravitating towards the trivial. But for this check, and the beauty of Jenny, he might have ended up as an Aylmer Montgomery. Even now it would be difficult to get hold of a character. There were in him the seeds of finicalness. The remedy? Annabel said, "Durrige could make a man of anyone." Annabel could help him. Annabel knew what was in their father's mind. But greatness of soul, how to come by that! Was it not too ambitious a hope for him—greatness of soul?

Suddenly the voice of Hawthorne sounded in his ears, and for a moment he had a vision of the blind man standing before him. It was extraordinary how Annabel vanished out of his mind, and with what overpowering force the blind man loomed up before him. "No man is safe who hasn't got a job. The bigger the job the better for the man. Looking on is for little fellows. Nothing like a fight to bring up the muscles. Don't be afraid to feel, George. Enthusiasm isn't folly, except in a crazy mind. Don't be afraid to love England. I'll give you three words to think of—Nelson, Duty, and Love."

He folded up the letters, rose from his chair, and walked to the window. Nelson. Duty. Love.

"It all comes to this," he reflected, "that life is a great thing, and not a little thing." Hawthorne had said that the disease of the present generation was fear of seriousness. Even statesmen in charge of England's destinies appeared to think it bad form to take themselves seriously. Seriousness is worse than wicked; it's vulgar. "I wish some of them were as vulgar as Nelson and Pitt!" He thought of Lord Whaddon and his bridge club, of Sir Anthony Holton and his prospectuses.

Then he saw how so many men make shipwreck of their lives. Either they look upon life as a little thing, or as a thing neither great nor little. Easy to fall between two stools. Life must be one thing or the other. It was either a great thing worth living, or a little thing not worth the bother of a man's thought. Let him make up his mind. Was the universe a little thing or a great thing? This earth of ours was as much a part of the majestic universe as the constellation of Orion or the whole immeasurable stretch of the Milky Way.

Those long centuries in which no life existed on this planet; those long centuries in which nature had fashioned myriad forms of life, building up, building up to man and his soul;

those long centuries in which civilisation had moved westward, and ever westward across the world, strewing the earth with the ruin of empires ; those long centuries of England's island story, from Alfred to Nelson ; the great pageant of English history, the rough and stormy birth of the British Empire, the chaos and clangour of the industrial era—all those long centuries, their toil, their agony, their triumph, and their defeats—surely there was a purpose running through it all from the very dawn of creation to this hour.

This hour !

"England has missed the tide." "Dark days ahead."
"Probably a smash that will finish us."

Nelson. Duty. Love.

He stood thinking. "Who was it who said that the Englishman is the man for an emergency?"

High praise ! To be self-possessed, unruffled, and adequate—always adequate.

If those dark days were coming, the man who would best serve England would be the man who believed in her, who loved her as Nelson loved her, who took himself seriously, and was not afraid of enthusiasm. The dilettante might die in the trenches for England as bravely as the hero or the black-guard, but the man who would save her from defeat and preserve her unconquerable through the days that were coming—he would have to be a man with something of Cromwell in his blood and something of Nelson in his heart.

Greatness of soul—how to come by that ! Well, he could at least begin by loving something greater than himself, and by joining up with the fighting-line.

What was it Hawthorne had said about the greatest fight in the world ? Something about personal greatness and individual responsibility. Yes, that was it. Every man is entitled to greatness. Personality. Individualism. A political Wesley preaching from that text up and down England—what a work he might do. But the first step—to love England as Nelson had loved her, Nelson who was once a nervous little delicate boy, as easily rattled as a foal ! Henceforth, nothing finicky.

He turned from the window and looked about him. "When I came into this room," he said to himself, "I shut the door on my boyhood." He stood there for several moments under the profound spell which had befallen him with the birth of his manhood.

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